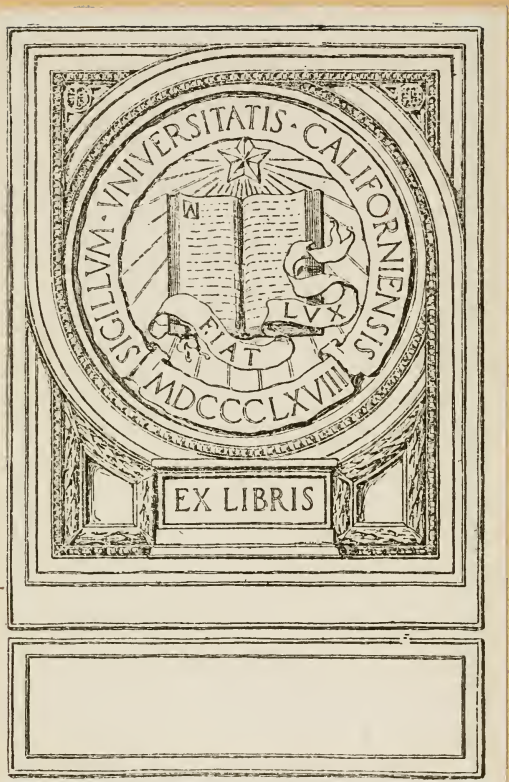
With a Reservist in France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WITH A
RESERVIST IN FRANCE

WITH A RESERVIST IN FRANCE

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF ALL THE ENGAGEMENTS IN WHICH THE 1ST DIVISION 1ST CORPS TOOK PART, VIZ.: MONS (INCLUDING THE RETIREMENT), THE MARNE, THE AISNE, FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES, NEUVE CHAPELLE, FESTUBERT, AND LOOS

BY

F. A. BOLWELL

WITH SIX SKETCH MAPS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON:

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LTD.

NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

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CALIFORNIA

TO

THE LATE COLONEL KNIGHT

AND OFFICERS OF THE LOYAL

NORTH LANCASHIRE

413387

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CHAPTER I

THE CALL, AND THE START

CHAPTER I

THE CALL, AND THE START

BEING a Reservist, I was naturally called to the colours on the outbreak of war between England and Germany on August 4th, 1914, so I downed tools; and, although a married man with two children, I was only too pleased to be able to leave a more or less monotonous existence for something more exciting and adventurous. Being an old soldier, war was of course more or less ingrained into my nature, and during those few days before the final declaration I was at fever heat and longing to be away.

As all the world knows, war was declared on the fourth, which was a sign for all reservists to present themselves at the post offices throughout the country, there to procure their travelling allowance and proceed to the depôt named by the authorities on each Identity Life Certificate. This I accordingly did early on the following morning. Late on the night before the General Mobilization notices

had been posted up outside all newspaper offices and public buildings.

I had rather a long journey before me, having to go from a town on the South Coast, where I then resided, to a town in Lancashire, that being the depôt of my Regiment. During the journey to London I had a conversation with a clergyman, and of course the topic was war. We agreed that it could not last for any length of time, and I remember telling him that I was going to try and get a soft job, and that I expected to have a nice holiday. Little did I think what was in store for me! Waterloo and Euston were packed to suffocation, men flocking to the colours from all parts of the country. The excitement was intense, and the scenes being enacted partially carried away my thoughts of sorrow at leaving home.

That evening I arrived at my depôt, and, after reporting myself at the Guard Room, made my way toward the block of buildings which my unit occupied, these particular barracks being the depôts of three units.

I met on arrival several old faces, and, after renewing our acquaintances, I there and then fell in with a batch of men going up for medical inspection. We were then examined by two doctors very

thoroughly. The next place to visit was the Quarter Master's Stores, there to be fitted up with uniform, equipment, etc. After that, as it was quite dark, we retired for the night, but not before we had all taken advantage of a little refreshment kindly supplied by some ladies who had come forward to release men employed in preparing food for work in the stores. That evening a party of 500 men had been sent to join the Home Battalion then stationed at Aldershot.

Next day a similar body of men had become fit to be sent away, and I proceeded with them to the First Battalion at Aldershot.

On arrival, we were placed into Companies and Platoons. Most of us had left the service some years ago, and had no idea of the existing new formations. One man, on being asked by an Officer where his Platoon was, replied: "I don't know, sir. I haven't got it on me."

However, after a week at Aldershot, we were pretty well knocked into shape, and had also been fixed up in accounts and allowances, and other details. We also had a lecture on inoculation by the Medical Officer, who hoped that every man would consent to be operated on. Another and more interesting speech was given by the

Commanding Officer, Colonel Knight, a man who fully realized the seriousness of the situation and evidently had a good idea of what the present war would be like. His speech was to this effect :

"Men of the 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment ! I wish to bring home to you the fact that we have a hard task before us. We are out to fight a great nation and men who are out for blood. This Regiment have always been top-dogs even with the boys" (meaning time-serving men : they had that year won nine football cups out of a possible eleven, besides other sporting competitions). "What are we going to do now that we have the men ?" (meaning the Reservists). "None of you men will come back—nor the next lot—nor the next after that—nor the next after that again ; but some of the next *might*. But we'll give those Germans something to go on with, and we'll give a good account of ourselves ! Remember, men, the eyes of the whole world will be upon us, and I know that you will perform whatever task is allotted to you, like men."

We were then interviewed by the King and the Queen ; and, later in the day, proceeded to Farnborough Station *en route* for Southampton, arriving that night, every one and everything being

embarked by 11.30 p.m. No one of course knew for what port we were bound, though many suggested Belgium.

We had no " send off " whatsoever ; no shaking hands or wet handkerchiefs—any one not knowing a war had been declared would have had no suspicion that these men were starting out on active service. Yet every one was jolly ; every one was happy. They put us aboard an old China boat, and stuffed us into the holds almost to suffocation, with one large electric light burning in a distant corner : it was most unhealthy. After an hour one could have cut the air with a knife.

No sooner had we left our moorings than we ran down a lighter, killing one man on her and knocking a big hole in her side. None of us below had the slightest idea of what was happening ; all we heard was an awful noise, with the lowering of the anchor. We all declared that we had been either mined or torpedoed ; but after a while things quietened down, and we all tried to obtain a little sleep.

There had been issued out to us on starting seven-pound tins of jam with our other rations. One was placed near the spot I had made for myself to sleep in. It was one of the darkest parts of the hold ; and, being tired, I was soon fast asleep. On

awakening next morning, to my horror I found myself covered from head to foot in jam—a sorry plight indeed, as we were not allowed to carry more kit than what we stood up in. However, after fighting for a few drops of cold tea, which had to satisfy me for a breakfast, and an hour in the sun and wind on deck, I had become perfectly dry, but my clothes were as stiff as a board. All I could do was to cheerfully declare that at any rate my armour was perhaps more bullet-proof than before.

Having set sail on the eleventh of August, we arrived at Le Havre on the morning of the twelfth, after a journey of twelve hours.

CHAPTER II

THE LANDING IN FRANCE

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THE LANDING IN FRANCE

At Le Havre we were met by two men of the French Army, who to our unaccustomed eyes appeared very strange in their red trousers and blue coats. We promptly dubbed them "The Pantomime Army." They were to act as our interpreters, and came forward with their credentials to the C.O.

After disembarking our transport, etc., we were marched, through the docks, on to the dock road, there to hang about all day long, amusing ourselves as best we could. A sentry was posted to stop any man from going into the town, but we were allowed to let civilians bring us provisions.

At nightfall we were formed up, and marched by way of the sea-front through the town and away up a steep hill at the back, where we found a camp already pitched for us. That march and landing I shall ever remember, and so will all those who took part in it. We were among the first English troops

of the Expeditionary Force to put foot on French soil, and the excitement was great. Over the whole of the distance we travelled we were hemmed in by crowds shouting *Vive l'Angleterre!* Often they broke our ranks to embrace us. We stayed only the one night at Le Havre, and recommenced our journey on the night of the thirteenth.

At Le Havre Railway Station we were packed into horse-boxes, 36 men and N.C.O.'s in each box, the total often reaching nearly 50 men. In that condition we travelled the whole of the night, and the next day passed through St. Amiens, Rouen, and Arras. At each place we had a wonderful reception—especially at Arras, where the Mairie and other Civic officials turned out with bouquets of flowers for the Officers ; and there was a Guard of Honour of French troops. The free giving of chocolates and sweets by the populace was indeed very gratifying to us : it made us feel more eager for the work which was to follow.

That night (the fourteenth of August) we detrained at a village called Le Nouvain. It had come on to rain, and we were very pleased to find our billets situated in a large schoolhouse with plenty of clean fresh straw for our beds. On the morning of the fifteenth we marched out in Brigade order, as we

always did on every occasion afterwards. My Brigade, which was the 2nd, commanded then by Brigadier General Bulfin, consisted of the 2nd King's Royal Rifles, 2nd Northampton Regiment, 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment, and 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, each Brigade consisting of four line Battalions. A smarter body of men, all seasoned soldiers, one could not wish to meet (the average of their service was not less than five years, all the younger recruits having been left behind in England as peace details). Our destination for that day at any rate was not a distant one ; we proceeded only to a small village called Esquerries, not more than three miles off. There we again went into billets for four days. On arrival at the farm at which I was billeted, the farmer's wife on seeing us broke into tears—she thought that we were the Germans ! But, I am pleased to say, the good woman, and her good man too, were more upset when we left, on account of having become so much attached to us.

We spent those four days in route marches ; and all men under the age of twenty-five years were then inoculated. The hard part of that stay was that no man was allowed to write home giving his whereabouts, or even to head the letter with his

name or Regiment. Of course no Field Service post-cards had been issued at that time.

On the morning of the eighteenth we bade good-bye to Esquerries, and continued in a three-days' rush up-country to Mons. The first day we covered something like sixteen miles, and came to rest in the usual farm-buildings. Before we set off the next day, any man who thought that he would not be able to perform the task before us was required to give in his name to the Officer Commanding Companies. I believe we had two sent back, one with a troublesome leg through a break, and the other returned by the Brigadier on account of his very low stature. He did not think that he would be able to accomplish any forced marches we might have to undergo. That day we did a matter of twenty miles.

On the third day out we passed through Mauberge. We had only covered some seven miles when a halt was called and we lay on the right of the road for six hours. While there we were told that a force of about 30,000 Germans was on our front, and the Cavalry had gone out on a reconnaissance.

At 5 o'clock they marched us into billets, but we had not been settled more than an hour and a half

when a Staff Officer came galloping up with orders to move at once. About four miles from Mauberge we could hear a distant boom of a gun, and all lines of communication had been cut. A halt was called in the centre of Mauberge for one hour, and we were told that no man was to eat his "iron ration," i.e. emergency ration, or drink any of the water which he carried in his water-bottle, as we were expecting to go into action and probably should not get the supplies up for four days. On we went, and marched for two hours without a minute's rest. The men began to tire, and their cry became the opposite to that with which we set out. Then it was, "Are we down-hearted?" now it had become, "Dump us in a field!"

After another hour we had passed the outer forts of Mauberge, and were feeling our way very cautiously. Suddenly we would go on with a rush; then more slowly; and this sort of thing continued until 2 a.m. We had had no real rest since 6 a.m. the day before; but at length we arrived at a small village south of Mons, where we found billets, one company of my Regiment going further on to find outpost duty. Thankful I was not to be in that company!

Our rest did not last very long. Arriving in as

we did at 2 a.m., we were brought out again at 3.30 a.m., with a remark from the Colonel that we were a lazy lot of ——. Some of us could barely crawl, being stiff and chafed from our long march of nearly thirty-five miles—not bad for one day, considering that we were fully equipped.

Our next move was to a field two miles off. We were moved so early from the last place because it was thought advisable to shift us before daybreak, owing to the probability of its being shelled by the Germans. In this field the morning was occupied by feet and rifle inspection. A German aeroplane came over us, and we were all ordered to line the hedges and seek cover, which we did in quick time.

During the afternoon we moved higher up toward the enemy, staying in another village for a few hours. We were put into another schoolhouse, which was well stocked with vegetables in the garden, so we set about preparing for ourselves an enjoyable repast. Just on our front the batteries were in action, and, whilst awaiting our dinner, we sat upon the wall of the school and watched the duel. It was a glorious sight! A flock of birds in the distance was mistaken by all of us for a Zeppelin through the haze. We were, however,

doomed to go without the big dinner we had promised ourselves, as we were given our marching orders and were off before it was cooked.

On forming up with the remainder of the Brigade, we were ordered to charge magazine, with one round in the breach also. Things began to look exciting, and in their agitation a few men let their rifles go off, narrowly missing their comrades. We then advanced through an avenue for a mile at the double, when the word was given to halt and lie down, no smoking and no talking, as we were now in support to the South Staffords on our front, who were expected to retire through us at any minute. After laying there the whole of the night, and having the Pioneer Sergeant run over by a pair of mules attached to an ammunition limber, we were not required ! All we got for our night out was the loss of the Pioneer Sergeant, with two broken ribs, and one other man injured. It had been a pitch-black night, and we had not noticed a trench just off the road filled with straw, where we could have rested our aching limbs.

As soon as daybreak appeared, we were ordered off that road ; and we had no sooner left it than it was heavily shelled. We dug some more trenches that same day and retired from them just before

they were blown up, so we were evidently very fortunate on the twenty-second of August, 1914.

On leaving the road, we retired to a thicket on our left rear, but quitted it, and came to the trenches aforementioned. Two batteries were just behind us there, and they were having a bad time. Also while there the Scots Greys, who were our brigade scouts, came in with a report of meeting with a body of Uhlans. They had evidently surprised these Uhlans, and had given them a warm time, the losses of the Scots Greys being only one man, I believe, and two wounded. As I pointed out before, we left those trenches in the nick of time; they were not the trenches we have now in France, but only what we call "one-man trenches"—very little more than head cover, dug with our entrenching tools and no good whatsoever against shell fire.

After retiring from them we were kept on the side of the road for the night; and for the next few days were rushed from one position to another.

Early one morning we set off to guard a bridge, and, after going a mile or so, we were again placed in a field. On the way we were handed some corned beef and biscuits, also a grocery ration, i.e. a tin of tea and sugar and two Oxo cubes, by some

A.S.C. men who had been left with orders to issue them to troops going into action. One of them handed me mine with the remark: "You'll need it, old man, where you're going!" Very cheerful, I thought.

We then advanced over some open fields in Artillery formation, the Scots Greys going first, probing all hedges with their swords. In this field we were told to line the hedges.

Two incidents worth relating occur to my mind; one was the bravery of one of our flying-men—he had just flown over the German lines, and on coming back was being shelled by the German batteries—how he escaped being hit I cannot think, as shells were bursting no less than a dozen at once all around him, and the fragments of shells were dropping around us everywhere, though no one was hit. Our Colonel, highly pleased with the steadiness of the aviator, remarked that he felt proud to be an Englishman.

The other incident occurred in connection with an order of the C.O. He gave out that the Germans had advanced upon the Middlesex Regiment, driving the civil population of various villages in front of them and thus screening themselves. He was very sorry to say that, if it

was done to us, we should have to fire upon them, as it was our duty to those at home. But happily it did not occur then, or on any occasion on which I faced the Germans, so I was spared the horror of assisting in the slaughter of women and children in such a cowardly way.

However, the bridge we set out to guard in the first place had, I believe, been taken by the enemy, so our services were not required.

Our fighting experiences at Mons were not very severe, as the work fell to the lot of other Brigades. The 1st Brigade, which contained two Battalions of Guards, the 2nd Black Watch, and the Munster Fusiliers, suffered far more heavily than did we, who were moved from one place to another, mostly in support. Operating as we did chiefly round the outskirts of Mons, our casualty list was very slight.

CHAPTER III

THE RETIREMENT

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THE RETIREMENT

It was from that field that we commenced the great Retirement. My recollections of the villages and towns we passed through on our way are now slight, since we often marched at night, though I have a clear remembrance of some of the larger ones which we traversed by day.

It was the twenty-fourth of August, on a blazing hot afternoon, when we started upon our great task. There was not a soul amongst the Officers or the men who had the slightest idea as to what was our destination. The first day or two we tramped along happily enough. It was not, I believe, until the evening of the second day that we obtained an inkling of what was about to happen, when we found ourselves passing through the outskirts of Mauberge once more. Most of us got the impression that we were retiring with a view to taking up a better position. A rumour went the rounds of the regiment that day to say that the

C.O. was leaving us for a Staff appointment; and he did leave us, but returned again in the course of the next few days.

Most of the next ten days remain in my mind as a nightmare. The weather was exceedingly hot, the long roads with stone sets stretching as far as eye could see were very wearisome, and the men were utterly exhausted. On the third day out we took prisoner a German mounted man, with two others, one of whom got away, and a second was shot.

On one occasion, just before entering a wood, one of our aeroplanes came down near us, and the pilot ran promptly to the General. After a few words, our direction was entirely changed. Had it not been for that aeroplane we should certainly have been ambushed.

We marched in Brigades, each day the lead being taken in turns, the last Regiment finding rear-guard; and the same thing happened by Divisions, three Brigades to a Division, and each Brigade taking its turn to lead. The Provost Marshal and Military Police went on in front to inform the civilian population of towns and villages to clear out as quickly as possible, and to publish notices of the enemy's advance.

The hardest time of all was when one's particular

regiment found rearguard: then we often had to march back for a few miles along the way we had come, dig trenches, hold the enemy the whole of the day, and then at night continue the march until we picked up the main body again. Oftentimes on reaching the main body it was found that they were just ready to start again, so the rearguard would be obliged to continue their march without intermission.

It was a couple of days out of Mons and during a rearguard action that the Munster Fusiliers received a good drubbing, but not until after they had held the enemy at bay for several hours. My regiment was that evening doing rearguard to our own Brigade when some of the Munsters retired through us. One poor fellow going through told us how his chum had had his jaw blown away by a piece of shell, and the Germans on reaching the Munsters' trenches had killed all the wounded with the very entrenching tools they had been using. We expected to see them coming in force that night, but after waiting until dusk, we retired on the main body. Unfortunately we did not get clear away without casualties. An unlucky affair occurred in this way: we had, the day before, passed through Soissons, and I remember it was at this village that

we caught up with the main body. On entering the village we had to cross a bridge with a river beneath, and the Northampton Regiment was guarding it while the Engineers stood by ready to blow it up when we were all over. My regiment was the last to cross, and we had already done so with the exception of one platoon, and were told to stand in the centre of the village, when some one gave the word that we were all over; and accordingly the Engineers blew up the bridge. No sooner had that happened than this platoon came marching down the road. Of course the Northamptons mistook them in the dark for the Germans, and opened rapid fire upon them. I was afterwards told by a chum who was in that platoon that a body of Uhlans came galloping down the road not five minutes afterwards; and he, with one or two others who had survived the Northamptons' fire, were taken prisoners. (This particular man fell ill, so they put him into hospital, and when we fought the Battle of the Marne we retook him; he was sent home, and after a month or two convalescent leave he rejoined us.) Naturally the Officer in charge of the Uhlans was very wild when he found the bridge had been blown up, as it was eight miles to the next crossing.

Most of our men had thrown away all their heavy kit, such as top-coats, etc., and the Germans of course made good use of them, some of them putting the clothes on.

At one place at which we were billeted five of these Germans stopped in the house next to a barn where a platoon of the Connaughts[1] were. Just before daybreak these Germans gave the alarm, and, as the Connaughts rushed out of their billets to the alarm post, the enemy were awaiting them with machine guns. This I got from a man who on the following night laid himself down to sleep on the pavement where I was doing sentry-go. Poor fellow, he had on no hat or jacket, neither had he any rifle or equipment. He had been following us all day, and had had nothing to eat. So I took him into the room of the house which we were then using as a Guard Room, and the N.C.O. in charge took him before an Officer. His story was proved to be correct, so he was allowed to stay with the Company for the night; but what became of him after I know not.

Next morning my regiment was finding rear-guard, so we marched through the town to an old disused mill. Going through that, and crossing a

[1] The 88th Connaughts got badly cut up on the Retirement.

field, we came to a swiftly running stream, which we waded across through water up to our armpits. On the other side we had a very steep bank to climb, and up which we had to drive two pack animals. One of these, after climbing up a part of the way, fell down and simply rolled over and over till he reached the bottom. We had to shoot the wretched animal, owing to a damaged fetlock. On gaining the summit, we set off in skirmishing order over a mile of open country, going through wheat-fields, trampling the ripe wheat underfoot as we went, until we struck a main road which ran parallel with the one we had travelled the day before. Just off this we dug the usual one-man trench, and remained there all day long. The only sight we had of the enemy was a patrol of cavalry too far off to be within range.

Towards four in the afternoon we commenced again to retire, and had no sooner reached the next village before the enemy began to shell us. Again we were lucky in getting off with no damage and no casualty. All this was all very well, but it did not suit the men. This running away from the enemy could not be stood at any price, and the constant cry was: "Why don't we stand and fight them? What are we afraid of? If you

bring us here to fight, let's fight—otherwise put us all on a boat and dump us down in England."

On several occasions we passed food-supplies left on the roadside—left for the Germans: whole cheeses, tins of mustard, one of which I carried for four days, but, on getting nothing to eat with it, I threw it away.

We would arrive outside a village, allotted for billets, perhaps about 7.30 p.m., and, after having marched the whole of the day, we were not allowed to enter the village until eleven or twelve o'clock at night to make ourselves comfy. The reason, I believe, was that it might be shelled by the enemy. No one was allowed to touch a thing—not even fruit—or he would be punished for looting; yet we knew very well that, perhaps on the morrow, the Germans would secure it all.

Various bulletins were issued during that Retirement, I suppose to cheer up the troops. One I remember contained the report of a German who had been taken prisoner, and who had upon him a diary, which—according to the bulletin—declared that the German Army was starving. Another, a very strong rumour, went the rounds, to the effect that we were doing a strategical retirement for the purpose of drawing the main body of the German

Army into France, whilst the Russians came in on the East. Two days after that, a report was out that the Russians were marching on Berlin, and were within a few days' march of the capital itself. Imagine our feelings, our delight. Remember, we were absolutely cut off from all outside news. What were we to think? Most of us expected that the war would be over in a very short time.

After the first five days, we were given a day's halt. The whole of the day before we had been marching until three in the morning, and were told on this day's rest that we had done so well, outpacing the enemy and outwitting them so successfully, that we should no doubt be able to rest for the next three days. On that day they paid us out, giving each man five francs, which, however, were of no earthly use to us, as we were all brigaded in a large field, and there was not a shop for miles. Our three-days' rest, however, did not materialize: we were off again next morning, with the enemy hot on our heels, having overtaken us by motors. So we had to continue our weary task sooner than we had anticipated.

We were all fairly quiet on the country roads, but as soon as we came to any large towns or villages

we would always knock out the strains of "Tipperary." Another good point in Tommy's character manifested itself—no matter how many miles he had covered during the day, during which he would be grumbling the whole of the time, he would, immediately on striking camp, walk if necessary for miles looking for a hay or straw stack on which to find something soft and clean to lie upon.

One turning point on that Retirement was a small town, by name Bernay, I believe, in the Champagne. There we arrived on a Saturday at midday; the afternoon was spent in resting. A few days before we had struck off south from Meaux, and we heard that we were to defend Paris. During the afternoon before we arrived at Bernay, we had passed an encampment of refugees numbering many thousands, and just outside Bernay were many more. I was on outpost duty that night; and a suspicious individual came up to me whilst I was on sentry. I, of course, inquired his business; but, as he could not understand my language, he took no notice. As I could not leave my post, I told another man who was off duty at the time to bring him in. This fellow went out with his rifle, but, although he was one of the fastest runners in my regiment, he could not overtake the stranger,

who got away. He may have been only a refugee having a look round, or, on the other hand, he may have been a spy.

That day we finished our retirement from Mons : it was the sixth of September, 1914.

THE ADVANCE

THE following morning we left Bernay behind, and, going out the opposite side of the town from which we had entered, we marched two miles along the road until we came to a hill on the left of the road about five hundred yards off. There we advanced to the cover of the hill and were ordered to lie down. We were then informed that a four-days' battle was expected, and that a force of 40,000 Germans was on our front. Nothing, however, came of it that day; so we advanced a few more miles, and took rest in a field for an hour. There we were told that all men who wished to do so could grow a beard. From there we marched on to billets in a village.

The next morning we were away early, and during that day we passed through a village from which the Germans had obviously made a hurried exit, for we found that many things had been left behind. *We* were the ones that were doing the chasing now, and a nice change it was to us! Of

course, we could not go very fast, not as fast as we had been made to go when retiring; and we were allowed to march in greater comfort. During the Retirement the infantry had had to put up with many trials—for instance: we took the right of the road and on the left we sometimes had Cavalry, Artillery, and Transport, which made marching most uncomfortable, whereas during the Advance we had the road to ourselves.

On the third day out we came across several dead horses and dead troopers, where our advance party had come into contact with the enemy's rearguard.

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

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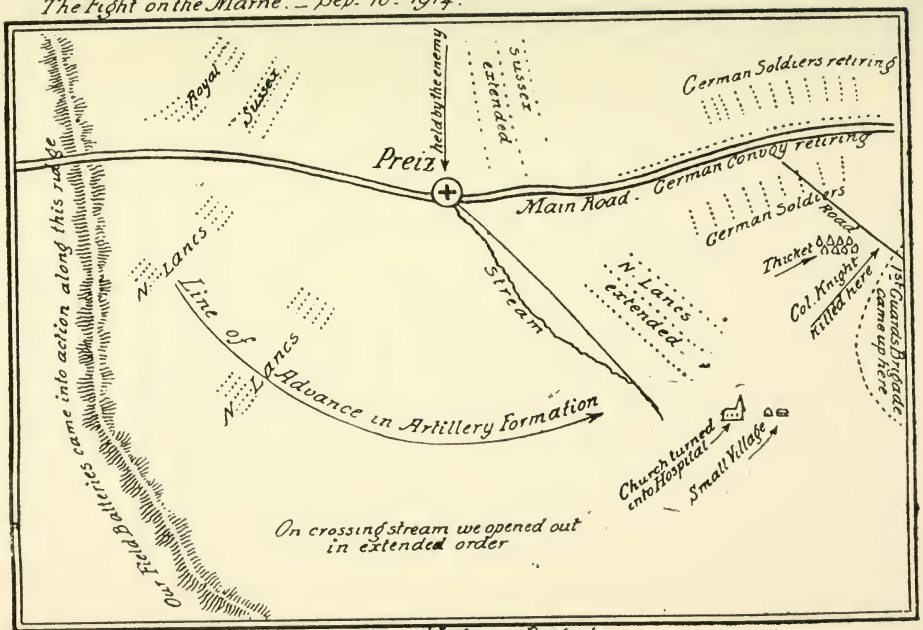
I WILL make a humble attempt to relate the Battle of the Marne as it was fought by the 1st Division. Our worst day—the one on which we did the most fighting—was the tenth of September. On the morning of that day we marched off particularly early, and we must have done close on ten miles, as we were halted for rest on two occasions. On breasting a hill about two miles from the last halt, we were again called to the halt, and the Artillery, brought up from behind, opened out on each side of the road and the crest of the hill. The word was then passed down the ranks that a large German convoy was expected to leave this village, and that we were to capture it. Every one was in high spirits, as food had been none too plentiful, and we were all looking forward to the capture of this convoy in the hopes of recompense.

The North Lancashires were the second regiment, with the 2nd Royal Sussex leading, they and the

King's Royal Rifles taking the left of the road, and the North Lancashires and Northamptons taking the right. We then commenced to advance in Artillery formation, three hundred paces distant and fifty paces interval: this we did until reaching the bottom of the hill and to the right of the village half a mile away. In this village, by name Preiz, were the Germans, and running out the other side, but up the hill, was the German convoy retiring, the village itself being in a basin. On reaching the bottom of the hill, we had to cross a stream: once on the other side we opened out in extended order, our idea being to skirt the village and come up with the Germans going over the other crest. Unfortunately it was a wet morning, and the men had taken the advantage of putting their oil-sheets round their shoulders to keep them dry, the oil-sheets when wet being of a similar colour to the German uniform. In the distance our gunners bombarded us, mistaking us for the retiring enemy; and we had no sooner come into view of our gunners than they let go. However, we plodded on, going up in short rushes by platoons. We had with us at the time a new man who had volunteered for the front at the outbreak of war, offering to enlist provided the authorities despatched him


The Fight on the Marne. – Sept 10th 1914.
Royal
Sussex
held by the enemy
Sussex extended
German Soldiers retiring
Preix
German Convoy retiring
Main Road
German Soldiers
Road
Thicket
Col. Knight killed here
1st Guards Brigade came up here
N. Lancs
Line of Advance in Artillery formation
N. Lancs extended
Stream
Our Field Batteries came into action along this ridge
Church turned into Hospital
Small Village
On crossing stream we opened out in extended order
Rough Sketch of Plan of Attack taken by 2nd Infantry Brigade.

Map 1.

straight out. This they had done, sending him to the particular platoon to which I belonged. To our sorrow, he happened to be the end man, and should have given the word when the other platoon had halted and got down, to enable us to advance. That first platoon, having got down, opened fire, and instead of our advancing under cover of that fire, that man failed to give the word. I was second man, and, after lying still with our heads stuck into the ground for ten minutes, I asked him if the other platoon had stopped—to which he replied : " I do not know, as I cannot see them." So I gave the order to advance. Consequently as soon as we got up we were met with a heavy fire from the enemy, losing at once one or two men. On crossing a narrow track of road near the crest of the hill we were joined by the C.O., who had come up there by the road to give us final instructions. He got hit by a piece of shell, which passed through his horse's neck and entered his stomach : he died a few minutes afterwards.

We were now getting quite close to the enemy and bearing round on to the main road ; but, as the fire became too hot for us and as we had no reinforcements, we had to fall back as far as the stream. A quarter of an hour after that the

Guards 1st Brigade came up on our right, and the Major who was then in charge of us said he was very sorry that we had not taken the position, but that we would try again: this time it would be an easier task, as we had the Guards on our right to help us.

Once more we opened out into skirmishing order and recommenced our task; meanwhile on the right the Sussex were doing well, and the King's Royal Rifles and Northamptons had succeeded in driving the enemy from the village. So by the time we had reached the crest again, the enemy had flown and the Guards were not required. Coming back into the village, we found the Artillery had advanced through the village and from the top of the crest were shelling the departing Germans on the other side of the hill.

We reorganized in the village, and when the roll was called we found we were about fifty men short of the number we attacked with. Needless to say, we did not capture the convoy, neither were our rations increased, but we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had, at any rate, taken the village and driven the Germans off one section of the Marne. Our greatest loss was our C.O.; but we also lost the Captain of B Company, who was

reported missing and has never been heard of since.

In that battle my section was particularly fortunate, losing only one man, and he the Sergeant in charge, who had been hit in the knee by a bullet, but it was only a slight wound. Moreover, on our second advance over the rise we did not get the shelling of our own gunners, as word had been sent back to them informing them of their mistake.

During the next three days we had only running encounters with the enemy.

On the afternoon of the thirteenth of September—a Sunday afternoon—we took up position on the top of a large hill facing the valley of the Aisne. Whilst there, one or two shells came over and we had a few casualties, but the words of our Brigadier were: "They will not give battle here, but over there," pointing to some big hills about four miles away, behind which lay the town of Laon. On that morning we had anticipated some street fighting at a place we had come through called Bourge, yet, although they had had the streets well barricaded, they did not show fight, but elected to fall back. That night we were taken from our position on top of the hill nearer the enemy to a village and there put into billets. At eight o'clock

every one was fairly comfortable, and we were settled in farm-buildings with plenty of good straw; but how we managed to sleep so comfortably—with the Germans only three miles off—I cannot say. Why they never blew us off the face of the earth with the big guns they possessed we often wondered—anyhow they didn't! and we got down, to dream of home, huddled into each other the best way we could to keep warm.

CHAPTER V

THE BATTLE OF THE AISNE

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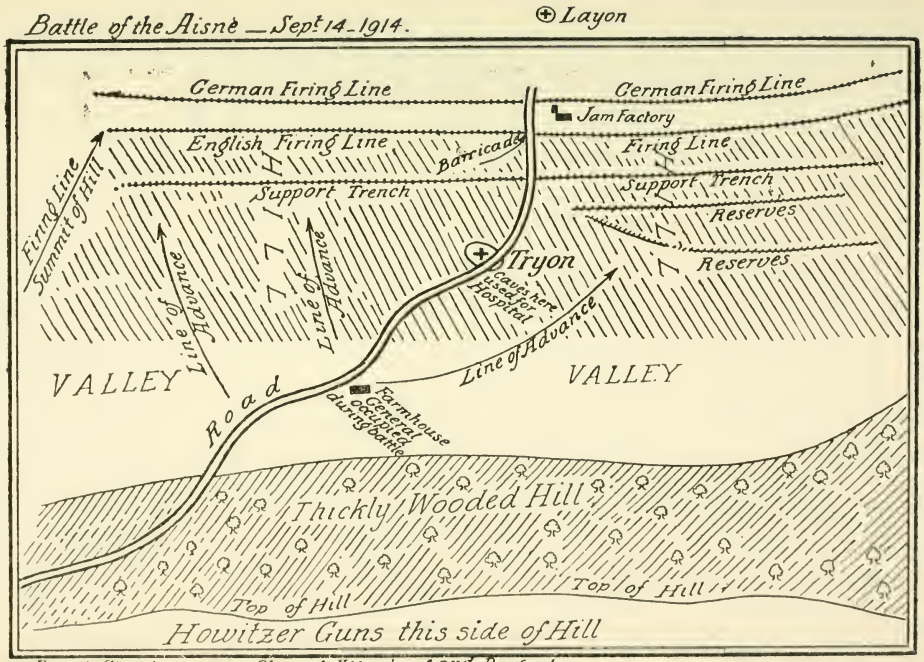
We were roused next morning with kicks from the platoon commanders, and, after much struggling and putting on of wrong equipments, we marched out, but not before each man had received two ounces of Gold Flake tobacco, the first English tobacco we had seen since leaving home.

It was the fourteenth day of September, and raining. Leaving the village, we marched down a road for about five hundred yards, bordered on each side by high banks. There a halt was called. On our right we could hear the sound of shots, and the Corporal in charge of the range-finder was sent to the top of the bank to take the range. He could not see very far, on account of a heavy mist, but reported the King's Royal Rifles advancing. We then doubled by platoons through an avenue of trees exposed to the enemy's fire, and gained some fields on the further side of the road, lining the hedges. From there into the valley led one road

which was little more than a narrow defile ; then it wound away to the right front over the crest which the Germans held. Halfway up this road was a small village called Tryon. At the rear and facing the crest held by the enemy was another and smaller hill thickly wooded. Before taking us through the defile and into the valley, the words of the Brigadier were : " That ridge has to be taken by nightfall—otherwise we shall be annihilated."

That day witnessed one of the worst battles I have ever experienced, as we were badly equipped with guns, having mostly only eighteen-pounders—" pop-guns," as the boys called them—whilst it was the first day on which we met the really big guns of the Germans—those promptly dubbed " Jack Johnsons."

Our particular front was facing a beet-sugar factory just off the main road, and there the fighting was very furious. By midday we had taken several of the Prussian Guard and of the Death's Head Own Hussars prisoners ; also report went round that we had captured twelve guns, which news cheered us greatly. One prisoner, a Prussian Guardsman, remarked on the way back: " Never mind, boys ; we shall soon be back in dear old London again ! "



Rough Sketch showing Plan of Attack of 2nd Brigade.

MAP 2.

On one occasion early in the day, having to retire from the top of the crest down into the valley, our Company-Sergeant-Major took us *viâ* the other hill through the wood to the position at the summit of the hill which the Germans held. It was a splendid move, well carried out, and without the loss of a single man.

On gaining the summit on the first occasion one team of our machine-gunners took up position and held it the whole of the day, helping us greatly to secure the position against all enemy assaults. The men stood their ground splendidly, three of them being recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. On our right was the 1st Brigade, and connected up with us was the Black Watch. One large shell of the Germans which pitched amongst a platoon of theirs standing between two haystacks completely wiped them out with the exception of two men.

We continued to advance and retire the whole day through. First we gained ground and the Germans drove us off again; then we came back with redoubled energy, until towards evening we began to hold on and the Germans to retire. On the right of the road was a haystack on fire, and we were in a small trench just thrown up behind it.

The bullets were flying from that rick as if a magazine was on fire and it was very unhealthy. At one time we were in a swede field, and a large shell burst in front of us, covering us with dirt. A chum of mine, being hit very forcibly with a flying swede, up he jumped, shouting: "I'm hit, I'm hit!" but came to the conclusion that he wasn't as bad as he had thought.

As darkness came on we all formed up in line, and the Brigadier, coming to the crest, remarked: "The Brigade will bivouac on the ground they now hold. Dig in." There and then we commenced a line of trenches, which are there to this day.

It had been a most awful and bloodthirsty day, with two of the finest bodies of men that ever faced each other opposed to one another. There was bound to be a good fight, and it was the cleanest and most sporting day's battle I have ever fought. Of course there was no time for food, and we got none that day; but we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had accomplished what we set out to do. We naturally had very heavy losses, including our second C.O., several other Officers and a large number of N.C.O.'s and men—in all nearly four hundred. The rations came up

that night while we were digging our trenches; they were brought up under cover of the darkness right to the front line and there dumped. Those who were near when they arrived were fortunate, as they got their shares; others who were further away got none. I was one of the fortunate ones, and filled my pockets with small biscuits and a lump of cheese, on which I kept two chums all next day.

During the night we dug our one-man trenches six-foot long and as deep as we could make them; it was hard work at times, the soil being very rocky. I got fairly well down nearly four feet by daybreak, when my Platoon Sergeant came along and ordered me to join my section further along the line, another man whose section was near me taking over my trench. It couldn't be helped, as we had all got mixed up in the day action the day before. When I joined my section I found the trench I had to take over only about a foot deep, and the whole week following, although I was digging on every possible occasion, I could not get down more than six inches, as I had to go through sheer rock.

Soon after daybreak the Germans were off again, shelling our trenches with shells of every calibre.

This continued for an hour, but did very little damage. After that they continued to shell our gun positions in the rear, our guns keeping up a steady reply. One Howitzer battery of ours was in a cave, running out by means of rails, situated in the wooded hill behind our lines. The enemy continued to shell with every kind of gun the whole time I was on the Aisne—that is, over a month—and the only casualty that battery had was one man wounded. The German shells would burst round it with a huge roar and a noise very much like "Krupp," and this small gun would answer with a short sharp bang, for all the world as if a little boy had put his fingers to his nose at a policeman.

Just behind the line and halfway down the slope of the hill was the small village of Tryon, where there was a public wash-house. A large shell had pitched there, but never exploded; its weight was not less than one hundred and twenty pounds. There was another on the roadway, and two or three of them in the valley: one stood up on its base. We were down there one day getting wood, and a chum of mine put his foot on it, knocking it over. An Officer passing at the time remarked: "You would have looked well if that thing had gone off!" My chum did not wait to hear any more—he was off.

That valley, when we left it, was like a pepper-box top—simply perforated every few yards. How we managed to remain alive on the Aisne the first week was simply a mystery. Food was scarce; and once we had a single loaf issued out between a hundred men. We tossed for it, the winner to receive the lot, the others going without. After the first week we were much better supplied, having bread or biscuits, with a ration of cheese or bacon, but precious little of that; and oftentimes I tossed for the lot and lost all! Fortunately there were plenty of potatoes and carrots in the ground—these we dug up, boiling them, and, after straining the water off, partook of them with a slice of cold corned beef. Some would boil the beef with the potatoes, thereby getting the salt from the beef into the potatoes: this we called "bully stews."

Our Division, I believe, took the extreme right of the British line on the Aisne; anyway, the French were joining us. They were very quiet by day, but as soon as darkness set in they would start a rapid fire all along their line, our boys remarking: "The French have got the wind up." Our orders were not to fire on any account, but to use the bayonet. At night every other man in the front line was posted as sentry, doing one hour, after

which the alternate men would do an hour. This continued until daybreak, when sentries were lowered to one in three.

The third night after taking the Aisne we expected an attack from the enemy, and the whole Regiment stood to till morning. It was truly beautiful—it rained incessantly, and one could not see more than a yard in front of one's nose ! That night a man of the Black Watch came in having been left out since Monday's battle : he had nearly every toe shot off and was almost blind. He had—so he told us—been in one of the boilers of the beet-sugar factory, and a German had fired several shots into the boiler, killing some more men who were in there with him. A Guardsman also came in, shot all over.

On the fourth night I was allotted a nice job. My Section Sergeant, coming to me just after dark, said : " I've a nice little job for you."

" Oh yes," says I—thinking it was a nice little berth behind with the transport—" what is it ? "

" Do you know anything about barbed wire ? " says he ; " just twisting it around stakes ? "

" I don't know," says I : " I may be able to do it ; anyhow I could have a try."

" Well, out in front about forty yards," says this

Sergeant, " you will find a lot of stakes and two reels of barbed wire. Now you go out and I'll send another fellow to knock in the stakes while you can twist the wire round them and make some entanglements."

I can't say I liked the job, because I didn't! The enemy lay only a few hundred yards away, and I had to go out there attracting attention by knocking in stakes and twisting barbed wire around them, a thing the enemy would be sure to try their best to prevent. But it had to be done, so off we started, creeping over the top. We were looking for nearly an hour for this wire and, after twice nearly walking into the enemy's lines, we at length found it, and managed, after several volleys from the enemy, to accomplish our task, and rig up some sort of defence. Every night after that, whenever we occupied the front line, I was one of the men erecting the barbed wire entanglements, and many were the narrow squeaks I had at the hands of the Germans.

At the end of the first week we were relieved by the 21st Brigade, containing the Sherwood Foresters and West Yorkshires. They were a new importation from England, My word! didn't they look smart, while we who had gone through so

much looked worse than tramps, absolutely reeking of mud. We were taken back to a village about five miles in the rear, and on the way back we had again to go through the defile by which we entered. Our batteries were still there, but the stench from dead horses was awful. This village was at the back of the wooded hill aforementioned, and there were several caves there, perfectly safe from the shells of the biggest guns yet made. In these caves we were lodged, and we had a chance of a rest—the first real rest we had since commencing the Retirement. At the bottom of the hill was also a river, where every one indulged in a bathe.

We were in those caves for two days; on the third day we were called out at 4 a.m., and we proceeded to a village on our right previously occupied by the French. To get there we had to cross a sky-line, fully in view of the German observers. We men knew that sky-line, for while we lay in our trenches the whole of the previous week we had watched the Germans shell it when the French troops marched over it. Unluckily for me, my Regiment was the last regiment of the Brigade to go over. The other three got through safely; but, as the road was thick with mud, we had taken to the field, and thus gave the Germans an even

better view of us. Two companies were nearly over before we had it : we were the last two, when over they came in batteries, five shells at a time. We were of course forced to fall back over the crest, but not before we had had twenty-five casualties, though we eventually reached our objective without any further losses.

That village was one of the very worst I had come across—dead horses and dead men everywhere. It was full of caves, in which we were kept ; but we stayed there only one day, during which an enemy aeroplane passed over, and on seeing us dropped a silver ball which slowly floated down to where we were, thereby giving the range to the German batteries. But they could not hurt us on account of the good cover afforded by the caves. It was the first silver ball we had seen, and at first we took it for a bomb.

That night we returned to our old caves once more. I afterwards heard that the reason of our being called out was that the 21st Brigade, which had relieved us, had lost the trenches through a great enemy attack, but had regained them by nightfall. Whether that was the true reason or not I was never really able to learn, but, on going back to those trenches at the end of the week,

which we did, we found a large grave, with a heading which read : " Thirty-seven Officers and Men of the Sherwood Foresters lie here." It was a Thursday night on which we went back to our old billets in the caves, and on the following Saturday we once more returned to our old positions, only a little further to the right, the 1st Brigade taking over those we had dug in the first place. There we spent another three weeks, two regiments taking the front line and two in trenches in support a little lower down the hill. First of all we worked this arrangement alternately four days in the front line and then four days in reserve, but this was soon altered to forty-eight hours.

It was a fine sight when we were in the trenches in front to see the relieving battalions coming up to relieve us : there were no communication trenches then, and they had to advance in extended order—lines and lines of them ; and when the enemy opened fire, as indeed they did occasionally, they all dropped down as one man. As soon as the firing ceased they were off again, and so on until they reached the trenches, when they would fall down just in rear, and on the word of an Officer we would get out and they would get in. We would retire in the same order as they advanced.

There was plenty of work on the Aisne during those days, the men in the front line connecting each single trench up with another, so as to form one long continual line; also the making of bunny holes. During the day we had the usual order: one man in three on sentry, now commonly termed in the trenches "look-out"; and, at night, every other man—if a quiet night, one would be on sentry, one resting, and one taken for digging a communication trench, each man taking his turn an hour about. Those in the reserve lines would all turn out with picks and shovels the whole of the night, digging one main communication trench.

One Sunday morning we came in for a bad time. The enemy finding our reserve trenches, which we then occupied with the 2nd Royal Sussex, with enfilading shell-fire, put several sixty-pounders amongst us, causing a lot of damage. After that occasion those trenches were never occupied, but we made up straw dummies in khaki, and set them around each dug-out; and we used to get great fun from watching the enemy shelling them, our boys remarking: "That's it, Fritz! Go ahead, and let them have it!" One shell went right through the Officers' mess-cart while the Officers were at tea, killing two. That cart had a history; how we

came by it is worth relating. During the Retirement we were ordered to give in our great-coats, which were placed on the baggage-waggons. There was also on one of these waggons my Company's money for paying out the men. This was done early one morning, and, when we marched off, the Armourer Sergeant and a certain number of men were left behind in charge, to follow on when everything was ready. I was afterwards told by one of this party that the Regiment had not got very far down the road when the Germans entered the village. One of our men, seeing the Germans coming and noticing this Cape cart with horse attached on the other side of the road, made a dash for it, and drove hard after us. He succeeded in getting away and joining the Regiment, but the Germans had done their best to stop him, as the cart was riddled with bullet-holes. The other men rushed out the other side of the village, thereby being cut off; there were about fifty of them from various Regiments, and, when called upon to surrender, preferred to make a fight of it. They lost one killed and two wounded; and some then gave in and some made off. One man who joined us again told me they used the open country by night and hid by day, for four days. They went about

like that in khaki, and on the fifth day got into a house and, procuring civilian clothing, made their way to Dunkirk, whence, after seeing the British Consul, they were sent to England. Of course, as there was no line established like that which the Germans have now in France, it was possible to do so. The Armourer Sergeant was amongst those taken, but he escaped from Germany later.

We were much better off now than at any time before; supplies came up more regularly, and we also had an issue of rum, as well as the Paris edition of *The Daily Mail* every day. We learnt whom we were up against—the great Von Kluck, immediately dubbed old "One O'Clock," since every day at that time they used to bombard us. It was here that we first heard that we were "the contemptible little army." Here we also received a draft of reinforcements other than Regulars, the Special Reserve joining the few remaining regulars.

I had here an experience of being a sniper. I was on sentry-go in the front line one morning when an N.C.O. came up to me and inquired "what class shot" I was. I replied "first class"—which I was. "All right," he said, "you're the man we want. Come with me to the Captain." After

putting another man on sentry, I followed him. He stated my qualifications to the Captain. "Just the man!" says the Captain; "the reason I sent for you is that we are persistently being troubled by a sniper, and I wish you to crawl out in front and bag him." "Very good, sir," said I—no good saying anything else; so I asked him the position he thought the German was firing from. "Half right," said he; "if you watch closely until those leaves blow aside, you will see his head"; which I did after a minute or so. "I want you to get that man," said the Captain. Off I crept over the top with loaded rifle, and, after going a couple of hundred yards, I lay down and waited, rifle ready cocked. As soon as the leaves moved I let drive my whole magazine at him. Then I waited again. The leaves moved once more, so he was still there. I got suspicious and crawled nearer; but found no enemy sniper—nothing but a post stuck in the ground! No more sniping for me!

Our stay on the Aisne was drawing to a close, but I heard afterwards that two civilians—one an old man and the other a girl—had been shot as spies, the man for working an underground telephone and the girl for sending off carrier-pigeons. These people had lived the whole time along with

other civilians in the little village behind the line ; they were found out by the French Division who relieved us. Every day, as regular as clockwork, the enemy had shelled us for an hour after daybreak, and for an hour at midday, and again another hour at dusk, with an occasional burst during the night. Rifle-fire was always plentiful on the Aisne at night on both sides.

We left the Aisne in the small hours of the morning of the sixteenth of October, being relieved by a French Division, after we had been in the trenches the whole of the time since the battle of the fourteenth of September. Whilst the French Division was coming up at midnight with the utmost quietness and on a pitch-black night, the enemy poured shrapnel into them, causing the loss of fifty-two to that Division, which simply went to show that the Germans had a pretty good idea of what was afloat.

That morning we marched to Braine, and there we entrained for what we all thought was going to be a rest, but really proved to be a harder task than anything we had had before.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

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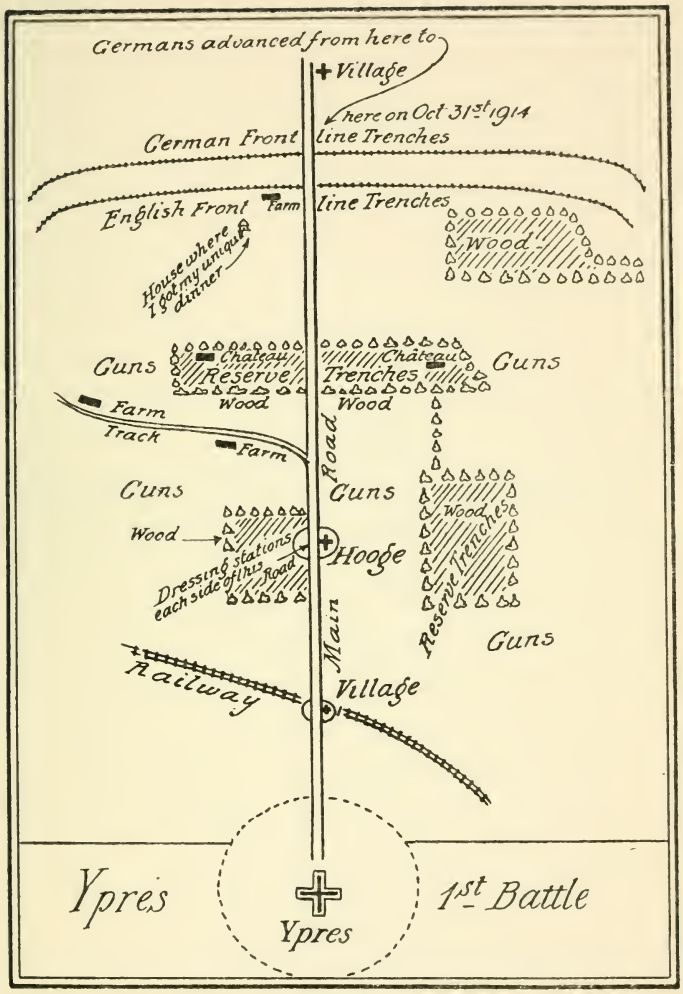
From the Aisne we travelled in the usual fashion, thirty-six to forty in a horse-box, *viâ* St. Denis to Boulogne, where we stopped until 3 p.m. on the Sunday afternoon of October the eighteenth. As usual, many rumours were afloat, the strongest being that we were going on garrison duty to some quiet little place, to pick up strength once more. That quiet little place turned out to be Ypres! The reason of our stoppage in Boulogne was that a train in front of us, also a troop train, had met with an accident; seventeen men had been killed: so we had to wait whilst the line was being cleared. We were supposed to stay with the train, but a good many men went into the town. Consequently the train moved off suddenly, leaving one hundred men and three Officers behind in Boulogne. They eventually joined us, each man receiving fourteen days Number One Field punishment.

Leaving Boulogne, we travelled some way up the line, detraining at a small station called Arneke. Early next morning they marched us on to Cassel, where we stayed one day, marching out next morning in brigade order. We proceeded *viâ* Beaulieu and Poperinghe, resting for the night a few miles north of the latter place.

The following day we proceeded very slowly, and scouts were sent out to our right into a wood on the look-out for the enemy. Evidently everything was in order, as we advanced through that wood during the night. On the way we met many horse-ambulances returning filled with wounded. Emerging from the wood, we arrived at the town of Boesnighe, and that night we found billets there. Moving off early the next evening in a south-easterly direction, after marching the whole of that night with fixed bayonets and hushed voices, we went into action the next morning.


Germans advanced from here to
Village
here on Oct 31st 1914
German Front
line Trenches
English Front
Farm
line Trenches
Wood
House where I got my unique dinner
Guns
Chateau Reserve
Chateau Trenches
Guns
Wood
Wood
Farm Track
Farm
Road
Guns
Guns
Wood
Wood
Hooge
Dressing stations each side of this Road
Reserve Trenches
Guns
Main
Railway
Village
Ypres
1st Battle
Ypres

MAP 3.

CHAPTER VII

THE FIGHT ON THE BIPSCHOOTE-LANGEMARCK ROAD, OCTOBER 23RD, 1914

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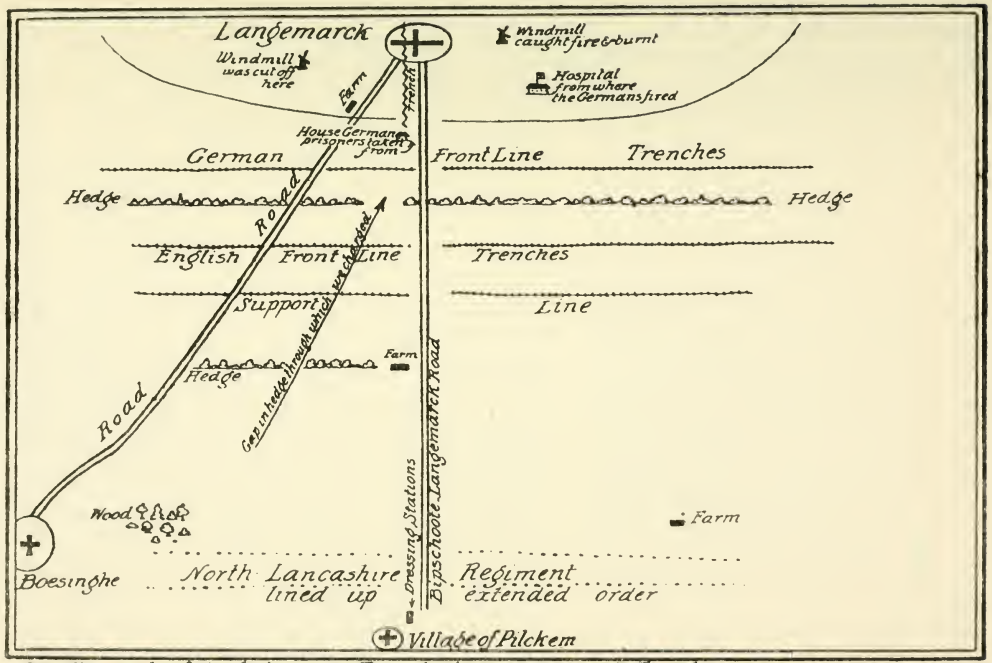
We were, I believe, sent up in reserve to the 1st Brigade. Whether that is correct or not, it is not for me to state—all I know is that we formed up well behind the front line, two companies taking the first line in extended order and two companies the second line in the same order. Thus we advanced about a mile over flat open country to the front line. We went up in short rushes, and a word of praise is due to the men who took part in it. I never even on the Barrack Square or drill-ground saw a better advance : the men went up absolutely in line, each man keeping his correct distance, and that under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Of course some men got knocked over ; but it made absolutely no difference. One Officer, a Major Powell, carried a chair with him the whole of the way, and, on reaching a hedge, would mount this chair to get a view of the enemy.

Two hundred yards off the front line, we made a combined rush into it. There we found the Camerons, with the usual one-man trench. The man I lay down behind told me that they had been out there three days and had had no rations, and also that they had had many men taken prisoners.

In this front line we had a breather, the German trenches being roughly three hundred yards away, and a hedge was also running parallel between the two lines of trenches, with a big gap facing us. Through this gap we could see the enemy retiring one and two at a time from their trenches. They appeared like so many rabbits running from their holes, and, as they ran, so we took pot-shots at them. After we had had our breather, the word was given to charge ; and this we did, going through in fine style. Just behind the front line of German trenches was a house from which we took a number of prisoners. The first man of ours to reach it was a corporal. He called upon the Germans to surrender and got a bullet through the brain for his pains. The Germans then saw us, and were obliged to surrender, and were given over to men to take behind. One German Officer remarked: "We don't mind—we've got Paris, and London is in flames." One of our Officers turned round and

MAP 4.



Rough sketch of the fight on the Bipschoote-Langemarck Road.

said : " You know that's not true." Whereon he remarked : " I know, but the men believe it."

The troops we were fighting there were on the whole very young, and they had new clothing and equipment, and told us that they had left Germany for what they thought would be manœuvres in Belgium, and did not expect seeing the firing line for some months. I myself really thought the war was over that day, as Germans surrendered from all directions and we overran their trenches everywhere.

I went on with the first line, right into the village of Langemarck. We got to a windmill, where we took up position—two Officers and thirty-four men, the Officers being Captain Craig and Lieutenant Gardiner (afterwards taken prisoner). As it began to get dark, we set about trying to find the other part of the Regiment, and another man and myself were sent out to locate them. Creeping along quietly for about three hundred yards, we came to a trench. Thinking it was occupied by our own men, we walked up, and found it full of Germans ! We were off with a volley behind us, but got safely back, reporting the incident to the Captain. After studying the map for some time, he came to the conclusion that we were cut off, and had better wait

until it was quite dark. This we did, and successfully found the remainder of the Regiment.

We had done well that day and set to work with a will during the night on a new line of trenches. These we held the next day, being relieved again at night by a French Division, with the exception of about thirty of us, who were unfortunately left behind.

It had happened this wise: there was a sharp bend in the trench, and my platoon was round the other side of that bend. The French, on coming up the communication trench in the dark, had gone straight on, relieved the remainder of the Battalion, and had left us there. The Battalion, on forming up in the rear to march off, had found that we were missing; they had waited for us in a field, naturally thinking we should join up as soon as we had been relieved. After waiting for an hour, daybreak came, and the Germans had commenced to shell them; so they had made off, leaving us behind.

We in the trenches were rather worried by a party firing over our heads, apparently from behind, and the Germans were in front. Towards daybreak the men on our left commenced firing heavily, and the Officer in charge of us (Lieutenant Gardiner) shouted out to know the reason of it.

After shouting several times and getting no answer, he sent an N.C.O. down to inquire. When that N.C.O. came back and reported that the trench was full of French troops, we knew then the Regiment had gone and had left us—anyhow, Lieutenant Gardiner went behind and found the men who had been firing over our heads to be French troops also. They were in a ditch, evidently in the dark taking this ditch to be the line of trenches. Of course, on being told their mistake, they cheerfully came up and let us fall to the rear.

On the way back we inquired of every one if they knew the whereabouts of our Regiment, but, as no one knew, we were stranded. We then marched back to our old billets in Boesinghe, which we had left a couple of days before. We found no Regiment there, so the Officer took us all into an estaminet (beer-shop), and ordered us coffee and food. We then heard from a Staff Officer that the Regiment had gone on to Ypres. It was Sunday morning, October 25th, 1914, when we arrived at Ypres. The town was then practically in its normal state, being full of civilians just returning from Mass, and no German shell had yet visited the town. There we found our Corps Headquarters, and the Officer in charge of us, having reported the episode

of how we got left behind in the trenches and learnt the whereabouts of the Regiment, was told that the G.O.C. was highly pleased with our work of the last two days, and that when he reported to the C.O. (Major Carter), who had joined us recently and had led us in the last attack, he was to tell him that the men who had been left behind were to be struck off all guards, fatigues, etc., for the next twenty-four hours and to be given a thorough rest.

Thus ended the Langemarck engagement so far as we were concerned. On October 26th, 1914, General Headquarters issued the report, a copy of which appeared in the current account of *The Times* of November 17th, 1914, as follows:

"THE GALLANT NORTH LANCASHIRES
"SPECIAL 2ND BRIGADE ORDER
"26TH OCTOBER, 1914

"In the action of the 23rd of October, 1914, the 2nd Infantry Brigade (less the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment left at Boesinghe) was allotted the task of reinforcing the 1st Infantry Brigade and retaking the trenches along the Bipschoote-Langemarck Road, which had been occupied by the enemy. In spite of the stubborn resistance offered by the

German troops, the object of the engagement was accomplished, but not without many casualties in the Brigade.

"By nightfall the trenches previously captured by the Germans had been reoccupied, about 500 prisoners captured, and fully 1,500 German dead were lying out in front of our trenches.

"The Brigadier-General congratulates the 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, Northampton Regiment, and the 2nd K.R.R.C. (King's Royal Rifle Corps), but desires specially to commend the fine soldier-like spirit of the 1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, which, advancing steadily under heavy shell and rifle fire, and aided by machine-guns, was enabled to form up within a comparatively short distance of the enemy's trenches. Fixing bayonets, the battalion then charged, carried the trenches, and occupied them; and to them must be allotted the majority of the prisoners captured. The Brigadier-General congratulates himself on having in his Brigade a battalion which, after marching the whole of the previous night without food or rest, was able to maintain its splendid record in the past by the determination and self-sacrifice displayed in this action.

"The Brigadier-General has received special telegrams of congratulations from both the G.O.C.-in-Chief, 1st Corps, and the G.O.C., 1st Division, and he hopes that in the next engagement in which the Brigade takes part the high reputation which the Brigade already holds may be further added to.

"(*Signed*) B. PAKENHAM, CAPTAIN,
"Brigade Major 2nd Infantry Brigade."

On October 26th, 1914, we left our billets on the Melin Road, and proceeded further up, halting about halfway between Ypres and Hooge, called then by us the "black and white village." There we were placed in a field, and, once more lining the hedges, we stopped there the rest of the day. A regrettable incident took place towards evening: one of our own aeroplanes was brought down by our own fire, under the impression that it was an enemy. It caught fire five hundred yards up, and burned furiously: both men, pilot and observer, were killed.

The following morning, October the twenty-seventh, we filed out of these fields, and, passing through Hooge, continued up the road as far as a large wood on the left of the road and about three

miles from Ypres town. At the north end of this wood were some batteries of artillery behind a large château, and in this wood we dug lines of trenches with entrenching tools.

Next day, the twenty-eighth, we were taken from here to another wood on our left front nearly half-a-mile from the last. We had a little difficulty in reaching it, as the whole of the distance was within view of the enemy. Anyhow, we did the distance, by platoons, at the double and at a hundred paces interval.

This wood was larger than the one we had just left, and we commenced at once to dig in at the rear end. We had had no casualties on the journey, although the Germans had shelled us with eighteen-pounders, all shells, fortunately, bursting at each side of the road. We stayed in this wood until the next morning, then retiring to the one we had come from. We had one or two casualties before we left, losing one or two men wounded and a horse killed, the enemy's observation having been attracted to us by the smoke from a fire.

That afternoon, the twenty-ninth of October, we proceeded to advance once more. Getting nearly a mile up the main road, we took the left side, going out in extended order. Thence we advanced

another half-mile, coming under shell-fire ; when we reached the rise, we lay down. All this time we had seen nothing of the enemy, though bullets were flying all around us. It was then dark, but we did not stay there. Closing in on the right, we came to a village : here the bullets were very thick, but we continued to cross the village along the main road to the right. The name of this village I never heard ; it is now in the enemy's hands. In its centre was what looked like the ruins of a windmill : we could see the arms and sails on the ground, but the remainder appeared to be nothing but a huge pile of stones.

Crossing the village into some more fields, we formed up into line, and there commenced to dig another line of trenches—the King's Royal Rifles on our left and on our right the 3rd Brigade, consisting of the Queen's Royal West Kents, Welsh and South Wales Borderers.

That night we brought in a German sniper, who had evidently been wounded in the stomach. He could not give us any information, as he was too badly wounded.

Later on, while we were digging, the C.O. gave out to us that there was to be no retirement from here : we were to hold the position at all

costs. The Rifles on our left were commanding the top of the hill, and, as our line ran down a slope, we were ordered to dig our trenches forty feet long facing the enemy but in step fashion, one behind the other. This we did, bringing the last trench on the right of our line just in front of a wood. We worked all night on these trenches, making them as strong as possible, knowing that there was to be no retirement.

Next morning, the thirtieth, we were very heavily bombarded, and the bombardment increased in violence towards midday, when we were ordered out of our trenches and to advance. We again moved up about a thousand yards, but there was still no sign of the enemy—shells were abundant. In front of a farm-house we dug in again, and then we began to see our troops retiring on the right. Two or three of the Welsh passing near, we inquired what was going on, when they replied: "It's hell. The Queen's are absolutely cut up" —which was true—what remained of them were sent down the line for garrison duties. We then began to expect a little excitement, but it did not come off that day; and we were once more ordered to return to the line we had left earlier.

Next morning, the thirty-first, the Germans

bombarded us more violently than ever. This continued for several hours. The next thing was that we saw the Germans coming; and they did come—in their thousands. We kept them off for an hour or two when the C.O. of the King's Royal Rifles consulted us, or rather our C.O., about retiring. I remember the two Officers having a heated argument over it, as they stood by a farm-house immediately in rear of the line. I do not, however, know what their argument was, but heard afterwards that the King's Royal Rifles had got short of ammunition. The words I did hear from our C.O. were: "It's the General's orders that we hold the position at all costs, and this I'll do if I lose the whole regiment."

We continued to fire until the Germans were on our trenches and coming through the line the King's Royal Rifles had vacated on our left. I was in the third line of steps near the farm-house, where I overheard some of the conversation of the two C.O.'s. Just in front of the King's Royal Rifles' trenches was a huge German Officer waving with one hand to the retiring Rifles to surrender and with the other waving his troops on. It did not seem of much good for us few men to attempt to fight that dense mass of Germans, but we did; and out

of the thousand, or thereabouts, that we lined up with a couple of nights before very few got away, the enemy taking somewhere about four hundred of my Regiment prisoners and our casualties being about the same number.

I had a run for my life that day. A chum of mine who was with us had a cock-fowl in his valise that morning from the farm ; he had wrung its neck but he had not quite succeeded in killing him ; and, as we ran, this bird began to crow. As for myself, I had no equipment ; I had run having left it in the bottom of the trench. It is quite funny as I come to think of it now—the old cock crowing as we ran ; but it was really terrible at the time. We were absolutely overwhelmed, not only in our particular spot but all along the line, and had to concede nearly one thousand yards to the enemy. We were also very unfortunate in losing our Brigadier, General Bulfin, wounded on the cross-roads by a piece of shell, I believe ; also our Brigade Major, who was killed with another piece from the same shell. I am sure every man in the Brigade felt very keenly the loss of the Brigadier ; it was he who took us out from Aldershot, and not a better General or a braver or cooler soldier under fire ever stepped on field of battle.

Most of my Regiment being gone and the remainder mixed up with other Brigades which had formed another line, two chums and myself went to a farm-house fifty yards behind this newly made line. There we had a field battery; and, after getting a little rest, started out to find the remnants of the Regiment. The enemy were still shelling, and the battle was still going on; but by nightfall, not finding any of them, we came back to the old house and found the battery gone. We decided to rest there for the night with some more stray men of different Regiments. Just in front of us, and in rear of the line, lay a wounded German. We decided to bring him in, and did so: he had been hit in the mouth, half of his tongue having been taken away. The poor fellow was in agony, every now and then lying on the ground and kicking. One of our men volunteered to take him back to the field ambulance, and did so.

That night we slept *on beds* in the farm-house, and next morning, November the first, after a hurried breakfast of biscuits and beef, we all set out to join our respective Regiments; but, after wandering about for an hour and seeing no signs of any of ours, my two chums—one of them now holds the V.C.—decided to go back to the farm-house and

make a dinner. There was plenty of vegetables in the garden and an outhouse full of potatoes ; and we found a spirit-lamp and a pot ; so we commenced to prepare our meal. In a short time it was all in the pot, when—alas !—the Germans began to shell our house, sending over incendiary shells. They let us have it battery fire. The first lot took off the off fore-leg of a cow, which along with some others was grazing at the back of the house ; the poor thing hopped around on three legs for a second or two and then dropped, the other cows running up to lick the blood from its wound. The next lot hit the top of the house, one shell taking away the roof of the scullery, behind which one of my chums was standing ; the other had already run into the trenches fifty yards away. I was the last to go, the other two having thought that I had been hit. I did not leave the place until the house was well alight ; and three hours after, when the enemy's guns had died down and the fire had burnt out the house, I went over to see how the dinner had got on, and found it done to a turn, cooked by the heat from the burning house. Needless to say, we did full justice to that dinner—all three of us.

We then went into the trenches with the Scots Guards and on the left of them were some of the

Gloucesters. On inquiring if they had seen any of the North Lancashires they replied, "Yes; they had gone back to the reserve trenches in the wood, there to reorganize." There we found the Regiment, or rather the few that were left of it—about one hundred and thirty.

That night we received from England a draft of reinforcements one hundred strong. After resting in those trenches that night, we were taken a little farther back to a wood in the front of Hooge and on the right side facing the firing line. There we dug new trenches and dug-outs, and always came back to them on after occasions to rest. We were never once taken into Ypres or any buildings, since the enemy had during the last few days commenced to shell the town and some parts were on fire. This information we got from our transport drivers, who had gone back some way behind Ypres.

We rested in these trenches for two days, and were then called out—on the afternoon of the second of November—in support of the 3rd Brigade. We went up in the usual skirmishing order, three other men and myself going on in front to warn the C.O., when we came into touch with the Welsh Regiment. We were very heavily shelled going up, but reached the Welsh with

insignificant losses. Lying in front of the Welsh and around a farm-house were a party of French troops. On the word that we had arrived and come into touch with the Welsh, our Regiment was made to halt in a wood just behind and lie down. We were only just off the road a little to the right, and I estimate the Germans were about seven hundred to eight hundred yards off. While we were there a 4.7 gun was brought up on the road, and at the above-mentioned distance fired point-blank into the advancing Germans. An hour afterwards, the Welsh made a charge, and a fairly successful one it was, meeting, as it did, the enemy in the open. They returned to their original position, while we took up a position to their right.

That night we again dug trenches, and next day, November the third, we had very little to contend with—only shell-fire; and we continued during the day to strengthen our trenches. At night we again moved a little nearer to the enemy, and commenced another line of trenches. By next morning we were well dug in, and it was a good job that we were, as the Germans bombarded us very heavily. At that period we did not have lines of trenches where one could walk about; merely the usual one-man trench. The Germans shelled us from early

morning until darkness set in and our casualty list was close on fifty, in addition to which we lost our C.O. and our Adjutant, Major Carter and Captain Allen, both killed.

I had a fairly decent trench there, as I always had everywhere, knowing that the harder I worked on my trench the more chance I had of safety. I here lost a decent chum, killed on that day, the fourth of November, by a bullet through his brain, whilst he was spreading jam on a biscuit. When it became dark two of my comrades came into my decent trench, and there we soon dropped off to sleep, all three of us, the Germans shelling us all the time. When we awoke, it was nearly nine o'clock ; we were roused from our sleep by some one throwing, or rather showering, earth in upon us. Up I jumped and inquired *sotto voce:* " Who are you ? " Back came the reply : " Who are you ? " On telling him, he replied that he was a Royal Engineer digging a communication trench ; we were not sorry to hear that he was not one of the enemy. He then inquired what we were doing there, remarking that the Lancashires had been relieved and gone back some time ago. After wandering about for an hour, we found the Regiment in the reserve trenches in the wood. Every

one had settled down for the night, rations and rum had been issued, and we had perforce to make the best of it. I did not sleep so well as usual, feeling the loss of my pal. However, next morning, November the fifth, we were told that, as we had had such a hard time of it of late, we were to be put into reserve on some fairly easy trenches on the left of the road and just in front of the wood we occupied on our first coming up. All we had to contend with was cross-fire from the enemy's guns. It does not sound very dreadful, nor to us men did it sound hard; most of us thought that we were going to have a fairly easy time of it; so into the trenches we went quite happily. But the shell-fire there was terrible, and the way the shrapnel whistled through those trees, to say nothing of the high explosives, fairly made one's hair stand on end.

I was just in front of the wood, where we had one company entrenched; fifty yards in front and the other side of a hedge was another company. These were the only two companies we had, as we had become very weak. In this reserve trench my company lay for twenty-four hours, exchanging with the company in front of us at the end of that time for another twenty-four hours; but we were

kept in that line for another four days through an unfortunate incident. We went into the front line of the reserve trenches on Saturday, November the sixth. In front of us were supposed to be the Zouaves. On our right front fifty yards off was a small house beside the road, the hedge just behind us running parallel but gradually getting to a point at the extremity of the trench, which ended in a *cul-de-sac*. Just over the top and in line with the main trench was a small trench, which we called the Thirteen Trench, as thirteen men occupied it. It was situated just off the road and commanded a view straight up it. Fifty yards along the main trench was a communication trench reaching to the hedge, where it stopped, letting us out on the other side. Sunday morning, November the eighth, broke with a heavy mist ; it was one of those hazy mornings that denote heat. Every one was taking things fairly easy, when a man next to me, on glancing over the top, exclaimed : " Look ! here's the Germans."

We thereupon sent for the Officer, but he could hardly believe his eyes : we were then supposed to be in reserve. The enemy was advancing upon us in close formation fully a thousand strong, and our full strength could not have been more than a

hundred in that trench and a hundred in the trenches behind, as I know that the whole Regiment at that time was not more than two hundred and thirty (not including Transport).

They were advancing by way of the little house and on to the Thirteen Trench. We kept up a brisk fire for a considerable time into the advancing masses; but we were hopelessly outclassed, and had to fall back on our other company behind. On reaching them, we all retired into the wood, drawing the enemy in behind us. It proved to be a fine piece of strategy, as we drew them on to unfamiliar ground and away from the trenches. We then turned round and made a counter-attack, driving them well back and leaving heaps of them dead and wounded behind.

We had almost reached our original line, when a chum of mine called to me by name. I went over to him, and found him lying on the ground: he had been hit and could not help himself, and he asked me to take him back to the dressing-station. I could not well refuse; so, dragging him and carrying as best I could, I made for the road, and there we nearly both got taken by the Germans, who were coming down that road in hundreds, and were only a few yards off. So I had to drag my

man back into the wood, dropping into a ditch with him at the side of the road, where I was able to ascertain the extent of his wound. There was not much to show—only a small bullet-hole through his hip entering his stomach. In this ditch was a Zouave; and he gave me some black stuff that looked like coffee. Getting, a little later, into the wood, I was able to take him that way to the dressing-station. I heard a few weeks afterwards that he had died from his wound.

On arriving back, I found that the Regiment had again retired a little way behind the trenches we had before occupied; and I also found that I had lost another old and valued chum, the one who had originally enlisted with me and had up till that time been through the campaign unscathed. I am thankful to say he was not badly wounded, although he lost the use of his left hand. There were not many of us left; our ranks were more depleted than ever; not more than seventy or eighty all told remained—nevertheless, they were planning to retake the trenches. On reaching the communication trench unmolested, we started to file in, myself going second man. Of all the trenches I had been in that was quite the worst: we had to absolutely walk the whole of the way over dead

bodies—our own men and Germans. It was eight o'clock at night, and of course dark, which made our task more unpleasant ; but we reached the end of the communication trench safely, though we had not got more than three or four yards down the main trench to the right, where it ended in a *cul-de-sac*, before a German patrol of about twelve men came walking along the top of the trench. We waited until they were on top of us—then I let drive. I can hear the yell of the fellow I hit to this day, as he threw up his hands and dropped. The man next to me on my left also let go, and I thought he had blown the top of my head off !—he must have had the muzzle of his rifle quite close to my ear, as I was deaf for some time afterwards. He thought *I* was hit !

On gaining the end of the trench, I was, with three others, sent into the communication trench to clear out the dead. A London Scottish Officer —they had only been out, or rather *in* action a week—came up with his men to relieve us, and remarked to our Captain, who was the C.O., that he did not mind seeing dead Germans but he did object to walking upon them ; so we had the job of clearing them out, which we did in this way : two men stayed in the trench and two stood on the top

of it, the two in the trench each lifting a leg of the dead man up to the two men on top, who then hauled him over. We had been at work for about an hour at this interesting job, when who should walk along the top under cover of a hedge but a German right up to where we were working! He was fully equipped, but we had discarded our equipment, on account of it hindering us at our task. On reaching us, I exclaimed to my pal, who was bending over in the trench: "Look, chummy, here's a German!" The two men on top having just gone further up had not seen him. On hearing me speak, the German made a motion with his hands and said, "Hush!" I was never more surprised in all my life—he evidently took us for Germans, too. I then said to my pal: "Find us a rifle": there were plenty at the bottom of the trench. He handed me one up, and, pointing it at the German, I was foolish enough to say: "Hands up!" He again said: "Hush!" I said to my pal: "Hand me up some ammunition, quick." He handed me up five rounds, and, pulling one out of the clip, I placed it in the breech of my rifle. When the German heard the bolt of the rifle go home, he turned round and bolted off —but he was too late: I had him right through

the back. We thought it best; then, to return to the company; and we did so.

When we had reported this little episode, I remarked to the Captain that I thought the man had come from the Thirteen Trench. He replied: "That's all bosh." While we had been away there had evidently been a discussion over this Thirteen Trench, and the Captain had asked a man who had been in it early the day before we had been driven out to go over the top—only a matter of ten yards—and see who was occupying it then. This man said that he knew a safer way round, when the Captain said: "Take two more men and go over." Again this man replied, asking if he might not go round. Then the Captain, becoming wild, said: "If three of you won't go, thirteen of you go. If you prefer to go the other way round, go, and I'll come and see you do go." I made one of those thirteen, and we filed down the communication trench; and, coming out on the other side of the hedge, we crept along behind it amidst the cries of several wounded soldiers of both sides until we came to the gap in the hedge facing this small Thirteen Trench a few yards away. The Captain was leading, then another man, and then myself. We had no sooner reached the top of the trench

than a guttural voice challenged "Halt!" and then I could see the forms of the Germans: they were packed in there like sardines. Of course, the next minute they had opened fire, our Captain and C.O. being killed on the spot; the remainder of us, being unprepared, turned and ran. The Zouaves, who had then taken up a position behind us, thinking it was the Germans coming, opened fire on us, too; and there were we running between two fires! I remember on coming close to the Zouaves' line that I took a flying leap clean on top of one of them as he was about to shoot. I knocked him down, of course; but, on getting up and seeing who I was, he clasped his arms around me, very pleased that I was not a German. Then, along with the remainder of the men, I returned to our old trench, reporting to the only Officer we had left the death of our Captain.

As we could not hand over the trenches complete, the Germans having possession of the Thirteen Trench, we were not relieved by the London Scottish, as it is a rule with the Regular Army that, on being relieved, trenches have to be handed over precisely as they were taken over, any that may have been lost having to be retaken. Consequently we were kept in these trenches another

forty-eight hours, and during that time we were, if possible, to retake the one we had lost.

As we were so very weak we were reinforced by a platoon of the 2nd Black Watch and one machine-gun belonging to them. The gun was fixed in position at the bottom of the communication trench close to the hedge, so as to cover any movement of the enemy from the Thirteen Trench. At the bottom of the main trench and in that traverse we had eight men ten yards away, and in line were the enemy occupying the Thirteen Trench. At daybreak the next morning each of our eight men received a bullet in his head from the waiting Germans, six being killed outright and two wounded.

I was then sent with five other men to fill their places, and our orders were to lie down in the bottom of the trench and not show ourselves, as our machine-gun was trained directly over the top to the Thirteen Trench beyond us, and on any move being made by the enemy the gun would instantly open fire directly over us. My comrades and myself lay there the whole of the day; the stench from the dead men who had been killed that morning was sickening—indeed, the whole of that trench smelt of blood, warm blood as from a slaughter-house, which in fact it was. We all got very cramped

towards evening, and a great deal of grumbling was going on, as in the ordinary course of events we should have been relieved by that time and back resting. Some one at length suggested going to the Officer to ask for relief and beg him to exchange us with some men higher up the trench, who had more freedom. I was asked if I would be spokesman. Replying in the affirmative, I went to the Officer and explained the case, telling him how cramped we had become. He asked me where I had come from. When I told him, he asked me who gave me permission to leave my post : I replied no one, but that I was the oldest soldier, whereupon he came with me to the bottom of the trench, and, addressing the men, promised them he would relieve them as soon as possible. He also said : " You have nothing to fear while I am with you ; the Germans are ten yards off." After further promising to send the relief, he departed. We then decided, as night was falling, that three of us should keep watch for the first hour and the other three for the second hour, carrying on like that alternately throughout the night.

The night was very black and the gloom very thick, and we could not see a movement of the enemy ten yards away, but could imagine all sorts

of forms and shapes in front of us. I think it was during our second watch that we discerned what we thought to be three forms moving behind the enemy trench and making for the road; so one of us fired. We heard a yell and concluded we had got somebody. During the third watch my two comrades grew very tired, and, getting down with the other men at the bottom of the trench at my bidding, were soon fast asleep. I then pulled two of the dead bodies to the end of the trench and stood them up against the wall facing the enemy to make them appear as if there were more of us. I had no sooner done this than a German got stealthily out of his trench; and, creeping along behind the hedge and to the rear of our line, up popped another, and then another. Whereupon I sent word of the enemy's movements *viâ* the next traverse to the Officer, asking what I should do. In the meantime I was doing all I could to awaken my comrades; but they were so sound asleep that, although I was kicking them, I could not get them to budge. The word then came back from the Officer to say we were to do nothing—not even to fire a shot, as the machine-gun was trained upon the enemy, waiting for them to come up. I was in a very awkward position, as I could see the line of

enemy trenches in front, and the one they were coming out of on our flank, and I had to stand there and say nothing whilst they crept around the back of us. I began to get " wind up " (frightened), as by this time they were six to one against me, and, being the end man, I had no chance whatsoever. No doubt I should have accounted for one or two of them, but I should never have got away myself.

This situation continued for about twenty minutes. I had at last been able to arouse my comrades, when an order came down for the North Lancashires to file out : we were being relieved by the West Riding Regiment. I may state that I never heard such welcome words in my life ! How the West Ridings fared after that I do not know, but I do know that I was well out of it !

That night we returned to our old reserve trenches for rest at Hooge ; and next day a message from General French was read out to us, praising us for the work we had done and regretting that he had had to keep us so long in action without a rest. We had been either marching or fighting since the middle of August, and it was then the middle of November, but he did not think we should have to go into the trenches again before we had had our long-deferred and well-earned rest.

That night the 3rd Battalion Scots Guards, just out from England, came into the wood also, and a fresh Regiment of Zouaves joined us. We were all very pleased to think that we were about to be relieved, and I remember well taking a dozen field post-cards from different men of the Scots Guards to post as we went down the line. We marched out at eight o'clock, every one convinced that we were going to have our rest, when, on reaching the road, instead of marching towards Ypres, they took us towards the trenches. Even then we thought we were going for our rest, some suggesting that we were on our way to a meeting-place for the Brigade ; others took it to be another way round—" Yes, *viâ* Germany," remarked some one. Well, we did *not* get our rest : we went into the trenches again on *two* occasions after that, and for forty-eight-hour stretches. At length we were relieved by the Guards Brigade, and went back to Hazebruck by easy stages.

I should like to say a few words about Ypres before I close the account of my experiences there. We were during the whole of the first Battle, from October the twenty-third to the seventeenth of November, 1914, fighting in the trenches all the time, with the exception of the first three days. I

was in the Bipschoote-Langemarck-road engagement, in what is now better known as "the Ypres salient." From the time when I first went there until October the thirty-first our front line was fully six kilometres from Ypres town, but between the twenty-third and the thirty-first of October the Germans gained from us quite three to four kilometres. We did not regard this as a defeat to the British arms, as at that time the enemy were, without exaggeration, six to one against us, and they were also much better equipped with artillery. On the contrary, I wish to pay my humble tribute to all ranks who served during that time, short as they were of men, sometimes even putting the military police into the trenches, to say nothing of the cavalry and cyclist corps. It was there that we finished off the remainder of what was the original Prussian Guards, as well as the Bavarian Guards; and to-day the British nation has to thank those troops who fought so well during that time, and put a finish to the chance of the Germans ever reaching Calais, and thence England.

My Regiment entered Ypres not less than one thousand strong, and while there we had five lots of reinforcements: we came away with only seventy-five men and one Officer, a Lieutenant. I do not,

however, in my above remarks refer specially to my own Regiment any more than to any other Regiment in my Brigade or Division—all the Regiments in the 1st Division were splendid: though some may have been a little better than the others where all were very good.

We went then to relieve the 7th Division after it had fought the rearguard action from Antwerp, and we were only just in the nick of time, for the Division had suffered very heavily. Altogether with reinforcements the 1st Division must have lost thirty thousand men in stopping the great rush for Calais. When we entered Ypres everything was normal; but when we came out of it the town was in ruins and burning furiously in several parts.

At Hazebruck we rested for close on a month. By "rested" I mean away from the firing line. Of work we had plenty. Two days before leaving Ypres we were joined by a draft of six hundred from home, which had been kept behind with the Transport until we should come out of the firing line. Captain Smart, who was with this draft, took over the Temporary Commanding Officer's duties during the three-days' march to Hazebruck, where we arrived in a snowstorm, and were billeted in private houses at the rear of the railway station

and running along near the line. Whilst there, we received two further large drafts from England, and we also had a lot of men sent back medically unfit on account of defective teeth, etc. Even there we were not left in peace, doing each day either route marches or brigade training. To every man new clothes and underlinen were issued; and we all had to have a bath !—an amusing affair, that took place in a rag-shop. A canvas bath had been rigged up, and each Company took it in turn to bathe, the water being fetched by the cooks in dixies. We had about four of these dixies filled with about twenty quarts of water to each bath, with some strong disinfectant put in it. About one hundred men would bathe to each bath, the last dozen or so revelling in pea-soup. Every one *had* to go in—as at that time we all had plenty of live stock crawling over us—under the eyes of the Company Officer and two or three N.C.O.'s. Enemy aircraft was continually flying over us, and one Sunday morning an airman dropped eight bombs, which killed several civilians, mostly children, and caused sixteen casualties amongst men of my Regiment.

We left Hazebruck on Monday morning by motor omnibuses on December the twenty-first,

going through Merville to Festubert. Four miles from Festubert we left the buses, and during the afternoon, waiting on the roadside for orders, we for the first time came across our Indian troops. The Meerut Division and 4th Corps were operating around that district. On the cross-roads at Le Touret we waited until dusk, and then moved up the road about a mile to the Rue-de-L'Epinette, Festubert, where we were told that each Regiment in the Brigade had to attack and take at least one trench. From the Rue-de-L'Epinette we were taken across several fields for about a mile, when the Brigade made a charge. It had then become dark and we were on ground that we had never been on before ; but we succeeded in taking three lines of trenches—the Regiment on our left taking one, though that on our right was not successful. I honestly believe that it was a ruse on the part of the enemy, as we did not take a single prisoner, and had only a few casualties ourselves.

That night I was doing duty as an orderly, bringing up the machine-gun section and also two mess-waiters with refreshments for the Officers. A funny incident happened on the way up. A house just to the left of the farm where Battalion Head-quarters were posted had caught fire, and another

orderly on the way down from there said to me: "Be careful which way you go, as I think that house which is burning is in the German lines; so bear off to the right." This the two waiters and myself did; and, after tramping along for some time and crossing several ditches, I gave it up, declaring that I had lost the way. In front we could see some yew trees lining a ditch about a hundred yards off, so we made up our minds to go as far as that, and reached the trees safely; but as we got there bullets began to fall with a plop into the ground at our feet; so we thought we had better go round the other side. It was, however, just as bad there, and in front we saw a trench; so we thought we would investigate a bit. Creeping up quietly to the parapet, we peeped over: several Germans, unarmed and burdened with two jugs of coffee and a basket of provisions, greeted our eyes. We very soon made off back again, and had not gone more than a couple of hundred yards before we came to a garden surrounding a farm-house. It turned out to be the very house I was seeking, but of course I could not then recognize it, as it was night-time, nor was it familiar to me, as it had been night-time when I first went into it. We were only about thirty yards off and could hear a babel of sounds,

but very unlike the English language. So I suggested that the best thing we could do was to lie down under cover of the hedge, and wait until some one came along. If he proved to be English, well and good ; if German, we should have to get out of it the best way we could. We had not long to wait before three forms loomed in the distance through the gloom ; and then we were all of a tremble ! Fortunately they turned out to be three of our own Tommies, so we waited till they had passed, and then we went in. Many a laugh over the affair have those two waiters and myself had on after occasions.

Next morning, December the twenty-second, we were properly let in. The enemy commenced to shell us, continuing for some hours ; then they came up in force. Unfortunately, by taking those three lines of trenches the night before, we had got too far in front ; and consequently we were surrounded before we knew where we were. Anyhow, with bombs and rifle-fire (our machine-gun section being behind and not in position by then), we kept them off as long as we could—then we had a run for it, as the Company on our left had had to give in. There were very few of us left that day ; but our machine-gun soon got into action,

and held the position until reinforcements came up, when the remainder of us formed up in the Rue-de-L'Epinette. When the roll was called we numbered one hundred and thirty Officers and men out of eight hundred and thirty who went into action seventeen hours before. Our C.O., Major Powell, was very much upset, remarking that there had been a grave mistake somewhere, and he would immediately go to the General for satisfaction: we, of course, did not hear how he got on.

That night we were taken to Lacature until all the stragglers had joined up: they made the Regiment up to about two hundred; and next day we marched off to Essairs, just the other side of the canal of Bethune, where we spent a quiet but not joyous Christmas Day, as we felt greatly the loss we had sustained two days before.

CHAPTER VIII

LA BASSÉE DISTRICT

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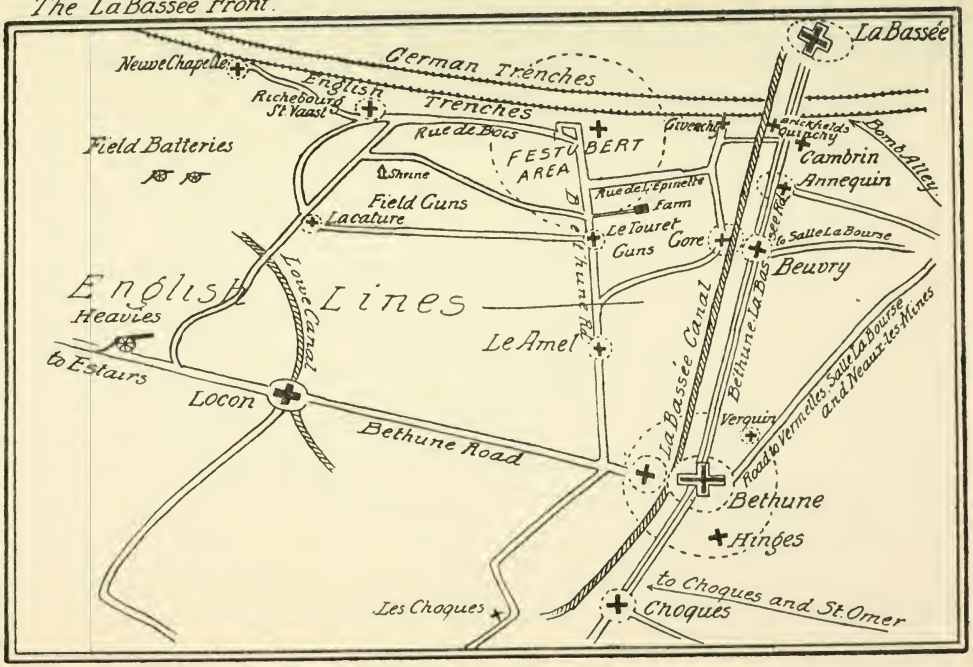
NEXT day, Boxing Day, December the twenty-sixth, 1914, we once more packed our traps, and, marching *viâ* Beuvry and Annequin, entered Cambrin. The first four days we were billeted in houses and shops, which had been shelled to pieces, and set to work digging ways through the walls of cellars for means to get out should the house be hit again by a shell during a bombardment. That night a night-attack by the enemy was expected and the usual precautions were taken ; it came to nothing. Although this village was in ruins and only about two thousand yards from the enemy's front line, civilians continued to live there.

Between the twenty-sixth of December and the twenty-ninth of December there was " nothing doing " : most of the Regiment were emp'oyed in the communication trenches, cleaning up and carrying planks to lay on the bottom, some parts of the trenches being deep in mud and water. In

the "Old Kent Road," a trench running from the church at Quinchy to the front line was in a really dreadful state: one had to wade through mud and water like whipped cream up to the arm-pits.

On the twenty-ninth we received a draft of sixty-nine men and three Officers straight from the base. They were sent into the trenches the next day on the Givenchy side of the canal to reinforce the 2nd Royal Sussex. All they had had on leaving the base had been their rations of bully-beef and biscuits, and, on coming out twenty-four hours afterwards, had had to join the Regiment and go into a charge with the Scots Guards on the Quinchy side commonly known as the "Brickfields." In these fields, and about two kilometres from La Bassée, were three huge brick-stacks, around which we built fortifications; these stacks were also very useful for our snipers and observers, who took up positions on the top. On the left of the fields was the railway track, and in rear of that, running parallel to it, was the canal; on the other side of which lay Givenchy.

On Wednesday, December the thirtieth, we had one Company in the trenches as I have already stated; on Thursday, the thirty-first, report came through that the enemy had broken through the


The La Bassée Front.
La Bassée
German Trenches
Neuve Chapelle
English Trenches
Richebourg St. Vaast
Field Batteries
Rue de Bois
FESTUBERT AREA
Givenchy
Cambrin
Annequin
Bomb Alley
Shrine
Rue de l'Epinette
Farm
Field Guns
Lacature
Le Touret
Guns
Core
to Salle La Bourse
Beuvry
English Lines
Heavies
Lawe Canal
Le Hamel
La Bassée Canal
Bethune La Bassee Road
to Estaires
Locon
Bethune Road
Verquin
Road to Vermelles Salle La Bourse and Neuve-les-Mines
Bethune
Hinges
to Choques and St. Omer
Les Choques
Choques

MAP 5.

King's Royal Rifles lines. This was late in the afternoon; and two hours afterwards we were called out and taken into Quinchy. On the way there we passed the Black Watch, who were billeted just in front of us; they were preparing to enjoy New Year's Eve. Arriving at Quinchy, I was sent back to find and bring up the other Company from their present trenches to join the Battalion, which I did. They fully expected to be taken back to billets, for they were in a terrible condition, as it had been raining all day long. Therefore I did not mention the place to which we were bound. Fortunately on the way we came across the Medical Officer, who, on seeing the state they were in, most of them suffering badly from rheumatism, would not consent to let them join up, but posted those suffering the least on barricade guard. I then joined the Regiment on the road at Quinchy near the railway track: and, advancing along its side, the Scots Guards taking the right, we succeeded in driving the enemy from the position they had gained earlier that day, and occupied the trenches, where we stayed all next day.

On January the first some shelling and artillery duels took place, otherwise it was calm.

On Saturday, January the second, we were

relieved by the 1st Brigade, leaving about thirty men on barricade guard on the main La Bassée Road. We went back into Cambrin.

On Sunday the third we left for Beuvry, three kilometres to our rear and one and a half kilometres from Bethune. We arrived there at 6.30 p.m., and went into billets. A lot of our men were sent back from here with trench-feet, which we then called frost-bitten feet; they were the first cases we had of it. On Saturday, January the second, ninety-four N.C.O.'s and men left us, and next day, Sunday, thirty-four more went off.

On Monday the fourth we rested, enjoying a bathe and change of linen at the Girls' College in Bethune.

On Tuesday the fifth we again left for Cambrin and relieved the King's Royal Rifles from the trenches, Major Powell, who had joined us at Hazebruck, going away sick. We arrived at Quinchy at 5.30 p.m., and the Regiment took over the trenches in front of that village, two Companies occupying the front line, one Company being in support behind the first brick-stack and the other in reserve behind the other two brick-stacks, whilst Headquarter Company took over and guarded a culvert running from the road under the railway-line to the canal bank.

That night and during the next day little happened beyond artillery duels. Around this sector of the line snipers were very prevalent.

Thursday the seventh was a wet day; nothing occurred with the exception of a German mistaking his way in the early hours of the morning and walking into our machine-gun emplacement. He came in with two cans, one with hot water and the other with hot tea. The boys, after making him taste a little of each, took possession of them for their own use. On being taken down the communication trench this German had the audacity to remark that our trenches were very dirty—not nearly so clean as theirs, as they had working parties cleaning up each day.

On Friday the eighth there was a great deal of shelling on both sides between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m., and also a heavy cannonade and rifle-fire during the afternoon, but no attack.

On Saturday the ninth the part of Headquarter Company doing guard at the culvert were relieved, as they were no longer required, and were put on fatigue duty, carrying all necessary things to the firing line, to save the men in the firing line from becoming continually wet through walking up and down the communication trench. These men

continued at this work until the Regiment was relieved, retiring at night into a cellar at Cambrin to dry their clothes as best they might. About 1 p.m. there was an hour's bombardment of the enemy's lines.

On Sunday the tenth there was a terrible bombardment, and seven men of each Company volunteered to capture an enemy's machine-gun advanced post, which was taken very successfully, with only slight casualties and some prisoners.

Monday the eleventh and Tuesday the twelfth were very quiet, with the exception of a bombardment each day.

On Wednesday the thirteenth I left the Regiment early in the morning, and proceeded to Annequin, a small village just behind Cambrin, there to find billets. We found a draft awaiting us there of four hundred and eighty N.C.O.'s and men and three Officers, and the Regiment was then relieved by the 2nd Royal Sussex, going to Annequin for rest, and staying there the next two days.

On Saturday the sixteenth we fell in, in the afternoon, to return to the trenches ; but before we went the Brigadier gave us a few words, saying : " To-morrow, Sunday, January the seventeenth, is the Kaiser's birthday, so be on your guard, as we

are expecting an attack in honour of it." This attack did not mature: the day was one of the quietest I had experienced in the trenches. A mistake had been made: the Kaiser's birthday is the twenty-seventh of January.

On Monday the eighteenth we were again relieved by the 2nd Royal Sussex, and returned to Annequin.

Tuesday the nineteenth we spent in resting, going into the trenches again on Wednesday the twentieth, again relieving the 2nd Royal Sussex, who took our billets at Annequin.

On Thursday the twenty-first the whole Brigade was relieved by the 1st Brigade; we went to Bethune, where the 1st Brigade had just completed eight days' rest. I was then on the staff of billeting orderlies, and helped to find billets at that town. It was a very unenviable berth, as the majority of French people objected to have soldiers billeted on them, and our Officers were often very dissatisfied with the billets we found for them. We settled down to what we thought was to be an eight-days' rest; but early on Monday morning, January the twenty-fifth, the enemy began to shell Bethune—the first occasion on which it was shelled. The Brigade got the order to stand to, and moved out of

Bethune once more for the trenches, after having had only three days' rest out of our eight. The report was circulated that the enemy had broken through on the right of La Bassée canal, at the brick-fields at Quinchy. It was true ; they had got as far as Quinchy church, and had penetrated the village itself, only to be blown back by the fierceness of our artillery fire, after which we delivered a counter-attack, going up in support to the Highland Light Infantry 5th Brigade 2nd Division, who were then operating around that district in conjunction with the 1st Division, and also in reserve to the 3rd Brigade. We did not on this occasion succeed in retaking all our old trenches ; we lost one of the three the enemy had succeeded in taking, and we lost one brick-stack. Our armoured train was in action, and did great work in keeping the enemy back whilst reinforcements were brought up ; but we were unfortunate in losing the engine-driver, a Belgian, who stopped a fragment of shell with his head : the naval men in charge of the train buried him with honours, firing the last volley over his grave. That night we returned to Beuvry, and stood to in case of another assault.

On Tuesday, January the twenty-sixth, we had an unfortunate experience. It took place at the

time when the Regiment was holding orderly room. Nearly all the Company Officers and N.C.O.'s were attending, besides the C.O., Adjutant, Machine-Gun Officer, Regimental Sergeant-Major, Pioneer Sergeant, Signalling Sergeant, Police Sergeant—in fact, every one of note in the Regiment. There were also a number of men waiting to be told off for various crimes; and they were holding this office in a farmyard, on hard cobbled stones, when a shell of large calibre dropped amongst them, killing and wounding close on forty Officers and men. The C.O. and Adjutant had a marvellous escape, as the shell dropped at the foot of the table without injuring either of them, whilst most of the prominent Officers and N.C.O.'s were killed, as well as three who held Distinguished Conduct Medals. That afternoon we returned to Quinchy, D Company going in support to the 2nd Royal Sussex.

On Wednesday the twenty-seventh we went into the trenches, taking up bombs in readiness for an attack. It was then 8.30 p.m. We found that the keep, the first two brick-stacks, had now become our firing line.

We did not commence the attack until 4 a.m. on Thursday the twenty-eighth, and succeeded in

driving the enemy out with bombs, but returned to our old line of trenches, where we received some casualties. During that day we returned to Cambrin to billets in reserve to the Sussex and Northamptons.

On Tuesday the twenty-ninth the enemy heavily attacked the keep : fully 1,500 Germans got out of their trenches, and, after advancing a couple of yards, lay down, in preparation for a charge. Our artillery then got to work, and, aided by our rifle and machine-gun fire, accounted for every man, only five out of the 1,500 being left, and these we took prisoner. Very excellent work was done that day by both the 2nd Royal Sussex and the Northampton Regiments. That night we were relieved by the Camerons and Black Watch 1st Brigade, and returned to our old billets at Beuvry.

Next day, Saturday, January the thirtieth, we returned to Bethune, and were billeted there in the Ladies' College, standing to at a half-hour's notice if required.

There we also spent Sunday. Next day I set off with the billeting party to find billets at a small place eight kilometres from Bethune and near Choques. After we had arrived there, we arranged billets, when a Staff Officer came up and ordered us

to return to Bethune, as the enemy had once more commenced to attack. Half-way on the road back we were met by the Brigade despatch-rider, who ordered us to return to Allouagne, the village where we had secured the billets. All this time there was a heavy cannonade going on in the direction of the trenches; it was close on ten miles away—anyhow, the attack by the enemy did not succeed, and we proceeded as usual.

The Regiment arriving here the next day, Tuesday, February the second, we were joined by a new C.O., Lieutenant-Colonel Bowlby. At Allouagne we rested from February the second until the twentieth of that month, having a similar time and doing similar work to that which we had done at Hazebruck, only on this occasion we were not troubled by aircraft. We were joined there by the 5th Sussex Territorials, making in all five Regiments to the Brigade instead of four.

On February the twentieth we moved a little further up, about one kilometre from Allouagne. On that march one of our men became a little intoxicated: he was placed between an escort. On the road he threw his rifle away, saying: "I'll fight no more." Next morning, on being brought before the C.O., he was told by the C.O., who had

overheard what he had said the day before, that he would receive fourteen days' field-punishment and fight on. We stayed at this village, Lozingham, for eight days, leaving on February the twenty-eighth for Mont Bernischon, where we stayed the night, and next day moved on to a small village, by name Les Choques. All this time we were really moving back to the trenches.

On March the second five of our men were overcome by charcoal fumes, Quarter-Master-Sergeant Border and Private Sailor losing their lives.

On March the tenth we were awakened by a terrific bombardment of guns, and did not then know that the Battle of Neuve Chapelle had commenced. We were hurried off from our billets at Les Choques and proceeded along the Lowe Canal to Locon, where we were kept until the afternoon, when, crossing the canal and marching to the right, we went on to Le Touret. That night we stayed in a field in reserve, but at ten o'clock went into billets.

Next day, the eleventh, we moved higher up to just behind the Rue-de-L'Epinette and occupied breastworks, where we heard the report of the capture of 2,000 Germans and six guns.

On the next day, the twelfth, we again returned to Les Choques to our old billets, which were not

required. We did not, of course, take full part in the Neuve Chapelle battle, but were there in reserve to the 4th Corps, the 4th Meerut Division taking the bulk of the work.

On March the twelfth we moved to Essairs, to the old billets we had occupied on Christmas Day, and renewed many old acquaintances. We stayed there five days, still in reserve and under an hour's notice.

On the eighteenth we removed nearer to La Bassée canal and behind Givenchy to a place named Goue. This time we found working parties in the trenches between Festubert and Givenchy.

On the twenty-second we left our billets at Goue, and removed to our old position in the Rue-de-L'Epinette, where we had lost so many of our men just before Christmas. We did not relish going there. I went as orderly to the Northamptons in case of communication being cut off by telephone, the Northamptons being more to our left in trenches at the Rue-de-Bois.

On the twenty-third we were relieved by the King's Royal Rifles, and, going round by Richebourg St. Vaast, we took the trenches on the Rue-de-Bois, relieving the Indians. These trenches were really barricades built up with sandbags. We had three

companies in them, and one in reserve in billets behind. We found there another implement of torture used by the Germans, a three-pronged steel or iron with sharp points: they were thrown out in front of the trenches for men to step on—it mattered not which part you stepped on: one of the prongs would be sure to run into your leg. That night we had one Lieutenant and one private killed, and about thirteen casualties in all. We were in those trenches for a week, until the thirtieth, and it was one of the quietest spots of the whole line—scarcely any rifle fire and little shell fire. These trenches are linked up with from the right Givenchy at the La Bassée canal end; then come Festubert, Aubers Ridge, Port Arthur, and Neuve Chapelle, all within a distance of five miles.

We did not have many casualties during our stay on the Rue-de-Bois, and returned to our old billets at Les Choques on March the thirtieth, resting and refitting until April the seventh.

On April the eighth we marched to Neuve Chapelle, and occupied the trenches at Port Arthur, a portion of the line there having been given that name. Another spot there was known as "Windy Corner," on account of its treacherous nature, as it was under a cross fire from the enemy.

On April the sixth we were joined by a new C.O., Colonel Sanderson, who came to us from the 2nd Battalion, which was then serving in East Africa. At Port Arthur we went into reserve, one Company occupying the dug-out at the rear and on the road. From this road our Engineers had erected a wooden track and wooden rails, for the purpose of taking by trolleys all necessities for the trenches. We found this very useful during our stay here of four days, after which we were, on the twelfth, relieved by a Territorial Division.

We then proceeded to Mont Bernischon, for three days' rest, leaving that village for Richebourg St. Vaast, where we occupied billets in reserve. Here I left the Regiment to join the 1st Divisional Headquarters for a refresher course in signalling, as that Regiment was at that time short of these specialists. I remained at Locon until May the sixth, when the class was broken up, and all men were sent to rejoin their respective Regiments, in view of a great advance that was then supposed to be about to take place.

During the time I was with the class, all qualified signallers and Officers of the Regiment had been attending lectures held at the 2nd Brigade Office

to learn the scheme of the proposed attack, which was to be commenced by a huge bombardment of guns on a front of less than two miles. Before we left our billets at Les Choques we were told that it was to be the greatest bombardment ever known; and we had detailed instruction in the various parts we were to play. We were all under the impression that we were going to have an easy task of it, as we were to take up our position and start from the Rue-de-Bois, which place had always been so quiet when we occupied it. That night we were taken to a field near the canal at Locon expecting to proceed to the trenches to be in readiness for the night; however, we did not go up, and stopped there all the next day, May the sixth, until 8 p.m. We were then sent back to billets at Les Choques, the advance having been cancelled for forty-eight hours. Thus we left Les Choques on May the eighth in the evening, and proceeded to the Rue-de-Bois, where we occupied the reserve trenches, every one being in and ready for the fray at 3 a.m. on the morning of the ninth.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE OF FESTUBERT, MAY 9TH, 1915

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THE signal for the bombardment was given by a big gun at 5.30 a.m., when all the guns commenced to blaze off. It was just as if all hell were let loose! The German trenches, like ours, were built up of sandbags; and within five minutes they represented the waves of the sea beating against the rocks. Débris was flying in all directions, and we men stood on the tops of our trenches to see the fun; but were very soon down again, as the enemy during the whole of that bombardment repeatedly sniped at us, and had the impudence to shout at us: "Come on—we've been waiting for you for twenty-four hours." At 8 a.m. the bombardment ceased, and the attack commenced in earnest. Our position was the centre, and we were led by the 2nd Royal Sussex, followed by the Northamptons, North Lancashires, 5th Royal Sussex, and we also had the 9th King's Liverpools, a Territorial Regiment that had recently joined our Brigade. They

were in reserve, with the 1st Brigade Black Watch holding the front line whilst we attacked. The distance between the two lines of trenches was not more than three hundred yards, but we could advance only half-way: we had to yield to the enemy's machine-gun fire. Some of the men had to lie there all day until nightfall, when, at 11 o'clock, the whole of the 2nd Brigade retired to the reserve line of trenches to reorganize, the 1st Brigade still holding the front line. We accounted for 430 of all ranks, not including machine-gun men, who were still in position in the front line.

Another bombardment was commenced again at 2 p.m., and, going into the front line, we prepared for another attack. Towards 4 p.m. an order came through for the North Lancashires to stand fast, and the Black Watch, sending up two companies, took our places, and then charged the enemy's lines. After repeated attempts, they eventually got into their trenches. Words cannot describe that glorious piece of work—no praise could be high enough. When they got into the trenches the Germans took their rifles and equipment from them, and, turning them out unarmed, told them to get back to their own lines the best way they could, turning their machine-guns on them as they

did so. We, of course, dared not fire, on account of the possibility of hitting our own men. We had the misfortune to lose our Armourer Sergeant, who had taken part in the charge; also three Captains killed, Captains Hay, Hill, and Adcock. Lieutenant-Colonel Bowlby was wounded; Lieutenant Fisher, machine-gun Officer, killed; Lieutenant Garrod, sniping Officer, killed on the enemy's barbed wire—altogether we lost nearly three hundred of all ranks, the Northamptons losing more than we did, and the whole Division losing nearly 8,000 men, without succeeding in taking a single trench.

We held the front line until 3 a.m. of the morning of the ninth, when we were relieved by the 2nd Division and the Highland Light Infantry, 5th Infantry Brigade. Proceeding to Le Touret, the Battalion joined up, and, after calling the roll, we marched on to Lannoy, there to rest.

On the twelfth of May we left Lannoy and marched to Bethune, where we occupied billets for four days. I was fortunate enough to procure a pass, and paid a visit to St. Omer, where my father was stationed with a Motor Transport Company. There I spent two very enjoyable days, but, on getting back to Bethune, I found the Regiment had

departed, taking with them my rifle and equipment. They had not, however, gone far—only to Beuvry, where I soon found them. That night the 47th Territorial London Division had by mistake taken our billets. We, of course, turned them out, upon which they began to sing :

"Though the North Lancs pinched our billets, never mind!
We have slept in the fields before,
And we'll do the same as of yore,
So the North Lancs can have our billets—never mind!"

There we stayed six days, finding working parties, etc., and then we moved up to Annequin for three days in reserve. At Annequin there was a coal-pit, which was shelled each day and nearly every night, although the civilians still occupied it. The church, typical of churches in the French villages, came under the enemy's fire first. Just behind and in rear was an estaminet run by two French girls. How they could live there beats me, as there were three large shell-holes in the walls, and a corner had been knocked off the house. They had placed barrels filled with earth over these holes, and carried on business in the same old way, making quite a good living from the English troops billeted there. On Sunday afternoons they used to take walks with some French Officers around what

was then the French section of the line ; our line finished on the left of the La Bassée Road. We stayed here four days, and on the afternoon of May the twenty-fourth moved into the trenches, taking over from the King's Liverpools the right of La Bassée Road, originally occupied by the French. We found on this part of the line the trenches very good, with four lines of them, a front line, a support line, and a reserve, called Maison Rouge : there were three red-bricked houses in this line. Some of the dug-outs in this line were also splendid, containing beds and furniture brought by the French from the ruined village of Cambrin just behind. Whilst we were here the enemy blew up a mine, but we had few casualties. In this village we had our Transport 1st Line, and also the Brigade Office. The Germans were quite eight hundred yards from us, and in between the two lines was an aeroplane, English or French, which had been hit and brought down by the enemy. On several occasions we went out at night to try to bring it in ; but we found the engine had been buried too far in the ground, and all we could do was to take away parts. One day I watched a man go out in broad daylight collecting German helmets.

We were relieved on the twenty-eighth by the

Regiment which we had relieved four days before, the 9th King's Liverpools ; and we returned to our old billets at Annequin. Around this sector of the line we were well backed by the famous French 75 gun.

On June the first we relieved the 9th King's Liverpools from trenches at the brickfields at Quinchy. They had been moved from the trenches on the right of La Bassée Road during our time of reserve to those at the brickfields. We had a rough time here for three days : the enemy exploded two mines, which sent up the largest part of one of our Companies (C Company) with them. We were also much nearer the enemy than before, and were continually bombed.

On the fourth we were relieved, and proceeded to Bethune, where we were billeted in a school. The very first night we were again shelled. We spent seven days here, enjoying the luxury of a large swimming-bath.

On June the eleventh we left for Cambrin to relieve the 1st Brigade, and put two Companies in reserve on the left of the road and in rear of Quinchy and one on the right of the road at Maison Rouge, one Company being in billets at Cambrin. At Maison Rouge we had a transmitting station to

the King's Royal Rifles, and from the 2nd Brigade Headquarters, the King's Royal Rifles occupying the front line on the right of the road, nicknamed "Bomb Alley," on account of its being so near the enemy and continually under bombardment. We used sentries on each traverse to look out for bombs : on seeing one coming and at what position it would be likely to drop, the sentry would yell out "Bomb right," or "Bomb left," as the case might be, when the men would at once clear to the opposite direction.

On June the fourteenth we were relieved by the 2nd Division, and left for Bethune, where we went into Corps reserve for four days.

On the seventeenth we left Bethune for La Pugnoy, there to rest : whilst here we received a draft of 183 Officers and men who had been transferred from a service Battalion of the Manchesters, on account of the shortage of our own reinforcements at the feeding Battalion then at Felixstowe.

On the twenty-seventh we marched to Cambrin, a distance of about sixteen miles, having our dinner on the road in a thunderstorm ; and, on entering the trenches, we received a welcome from the Herts Territorials, who had decorated the fire-step with pieces of chalk (these trenches were of

a chalky nature), out of small pieces of which they had built the words: "Welcome to Kitchener's Army." Fancy what the reading of that meant to us men, some of whom had been through the war since the very commencement! We did indeed feel grateful, and we had cause to be so, as we were supposed to have gone back to La Pugnoy for a Divisional rest and were expecting at least a month, whereas we got only three days of it. Whilst at La Pugnoy several Brigades of Kitchener's Army had passed through us and the 1st Division, those of which occupied the trenches at the time expected to get relieved by them. However, we had to go, and we were shelled pretty heavily here; we had three Companies in the front line, and D Company in reserve. On July the fourth we were relieved from the trenches, after having been in them for six days, and we returned to Salle-la-Bourse. We had then taken over trenches in front of Vermelles, and, after spending a few days at Salle-la-Bourse, we journeyed two kilometres to Noyelles; from there, four days afterwards, we again occupied the trenches for eight days. During this time operations were very calm, and all around the district one could see for some considerable distance—from Vermelles one could see the "Tower Bridge"

at Loos ; and I often used to gaze at it and wonder when it would become our property, little thinking that my hope would be realized within a couple of months. We did another few days in the trenches, and then went back to Verquin, near Bethune. The observation balloon used to go up here at the back of the village, and on several occasions the enemy shelled it, but never succeeded in hitting it.

On July the twentieth we were again at Noyelles, and on the twenty-third of that month I obtained leave for the purpose of proceeding to England for eight days, after having been on active service for a period of nearly twelve months. I had nearly ten miles to walk, fully equipped, to the railway station to get my train. I need not describe my brief visit home ; needless to say I enjoyed myself never better in my life.

Arriving back at Bethune on August the first, we learnt from Headquarters that the Regiment were in the trenches at Vermelles, and, on arrival at that place, we were just in time to see the Battalion relieved, and had to march back that same night again to Bethune, where we spent eight days, the Division holding a horse-show and sports.

From the eighth of August until a fortnight before the Battle of Loos we took our turn, with

other Regiments in the Brigade, to go into the trenches ; and a fortnight before Loos we returned to Lozingham to rehearse the coming battle. While at Lozingham we did Battalion training, and generally prepared ourselves. I had become somewhat run down and felt fairly bad with sickness, etc. ; when the doctor examined me he found I had a temperature of over 100. He asked me where I felt ill, and on my telling him, he said : " You ought to be admitted to hospital, but I'm afraid I can't do that, as you are a signaller and we are short of signallers." He told me to lie down in my billet and rest. I was like this for nearly a week, and did not feel much better at the end of that time ; but, as we were again on the move, I did not trouble him any more.

It was on September the twenty-first that we moved to Marles, a village one kilometre from Lozingham. On the twenty-second we marched to the trenches at Vermelles in readiness for the battle, arriving there at 3 a.m. on the twenty-fourth, throughout which day we were busy teeing in wires, etc., in readiness for our run to the German lines on the morrow.

CHAPTER X

LOOS

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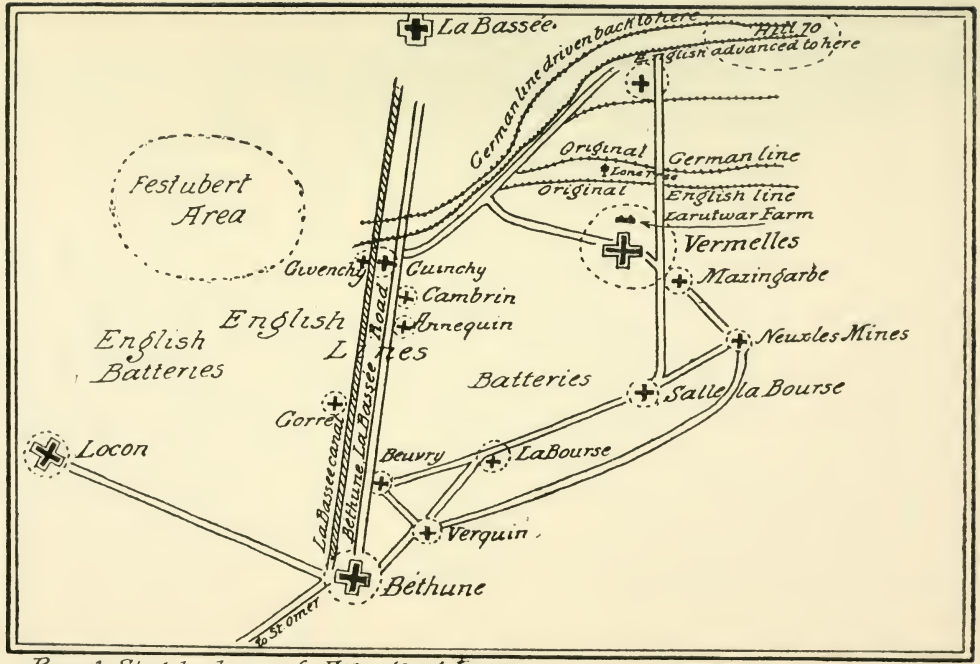
THE 1st Division took the centre, with the 15th Scottish Division on the right and the 9th Division on the left. The 1st Division faced a part of the line known as "Lone Tree," named after a tree between the two lines and the only one there. The Division had battle Headquarters at Larutwar Farm, and Brigade Headquarters in a part of the trenches known as "Daly's Keep." At 6.40 a.m. on the morning of the twenty-fifth of September the attack was to be launched, first by the Royal Engineers letting off asphyxiating gas; when that reached the German lines or was three parts of the way across, the Infantry were to follow. Of the 2nd Brigade the 1st Loyal North Lancashires and the King's Royal Rifles were the two Regiments selected, and to them was given the honour of going over first, the King's Royal Rifles on the right. Punctually at the time given the gas was let off, accompanied by smoke bombs, but unfortunately before it had reached half the distance across, the

wind changed and blew it back upon us. However, over we went, and, as our distance to the enemy's lines was quite eight hundred yards, we covered them by short rushes. On reaching the enemy's wire entanglements we found that they had not been sufficiently damaged to admit of our access to the enemy's trench; so we held on for reinforcements, which arrived in the form of the 2nd Royal Sussex; but we could not make headway against the enemy's machine-guns, although the Divisions on our left and right had advanced a considerable distance. A Brigade consisting of several Territorial Regiments in the Division was then sent to our aid, and this time we got through, taking several hundred prisoners. The Divisions on the left and right of us had advanced, the enemy opposed to them had retired and were to all intents and purposes cut off, so they had perforce to surrender. This gave us practically a clear run of about half a mile, and we saw, as we passed, that our objective at the chalk-pit was the village of Loos on our left. Fighting in Loos village was very furious indeed. This chalk-pit is situated on the Loos-Lens road, and on the left of it is a wood, where, after charging through it for spare Germans, we dug in.

At 4 a.m. on the morning of the twenty-sixth



Rough Sketch showing Attack at Loos

MAP 6.

we were relieved by the 21st Division of Kitchener's Army, as we had obtained our objective. We went back to our old original trenches, leaving the 21st Division to carry on. Our ranks were sadly depleted, having lost many men : it was an awful and ghastly sight coming back over the ground we had taken. About two o'clock that afternoon we heard that the 21st Division were not doing well, and that a couple of field-batteries which had taken up position immediately behind the old German front line had been put out of action, as well as two batteries to the right of Larutwar Farm, which was packed from end to end with wounded, waiting to be taken away. The motor-ambulances worked night and day.

Soon after this, the 24th Division, another of Kitchener's Divisions, came into action to relieve the 21st, very few of whom remained. This Division stopped in for nearly twenty-four hours, and retook some of the ground that the 21st had lost. The afternoon before the Guards Division, fresh from ——, where they had been in training, and the New Welsh Guards also went into action, making an attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt. They did good work, I believe, in taking part of it.

On the night of the twenty-seventh we were

ordered out from our old line to the old German support line in reserve; but next morning were taken out again and sent back to Mazingarbe, a small village behind Vermelles. We had eight hours' rest here, and that same night proceeded to the recently captured village of Loos, where were packed piles of dead Germans and men of the 15th Scottish Division. It was indeed an ugly sight. From one cellar we turned out twenty Germans, and we also took one who had been working an underground telephone. We spent one night in this cellar, and the following night proceeded through the village to Hill 70, where we filled a gap and dug a line of trenches, digging most of the time through solid chalk. While there we were heavily shelled, as also was Loos, where houses were crashing to the ground every few minutes.

Three days afterwards we were relieved by a French Division and went back to Neaux-le-Mines for a well-earned five-days' respite. After that we were put into the trenches at Vermelles, and on October the tenth the enemy made a determined attack on the 9th King's Liverpools and Gloucesters 3rd Brigade, to whom we had then been attached. The enemy were well driven off, but both regiments had to be taken out that night, and we went up in

the place of the King's Liverpools, and were situated in our old trenches near the chalk-pit. Here, on the morning of the eleventh of October, we were badly shelled : we lost a machine-gun team and the gun was knocked out. I was then ordered to take a message into Loos village to the 3rd Brigade Office, requesting them to send up another gun-team at once.

Coming back from this message I received my wound, getting a nasty knock through the leg, severing the arteries and smashing the bone. After binding it tightly, I managed to make my way to the first-aid dressing-station, a distance of nearly a mile and a half. Thence I proceeded to Mazingarbe, but, owing to hæmorrhage, I did not get my wound dressed until I was sent back to Lozingham, where I was sent to the operating tent of the 23rd Field Ambulance. Whilst awaiting my turn, I watched the surgeons take from another man's knee a bullet. Two days later I was sent to Rouen, where I spent ten days ; from there I came home to Salisbury Infirmary, and I was in this hospital for twelve weeks undergoing three operations. I was, on becoming convalescent, sent to the Red Cross Hospital, Salisbury ; and here I spent another month, and proceeded at the end of that time to the

house of Sir Vincent Caillard at Wingfield. At this house I was given massage twice a day ; and after a month was sent on to Sutten Veney. After three weeks I was given my discharge, and proceeded to the depôt in Lancashire, where I finally signed my papers and re-entered back to civilian life after having had one year and 246 days on active service.

The 1st Division on landing in France consisted of three Infantry Brigades, comprising :

1st Brigade

Grenadier Guards.
Coldstream Guards.
Royal Highlanders (Black Watch).
Munster Fusiliers.

2nd Brigade

1st Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.
2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps.
2nd Royal Sussex Regiment.
2nd Northampton Regiment.

3rd Brigade

The Welsh Regiment.
South Wales Borderers.
Queen's Royal West Kents.
Gloucester Regiment.

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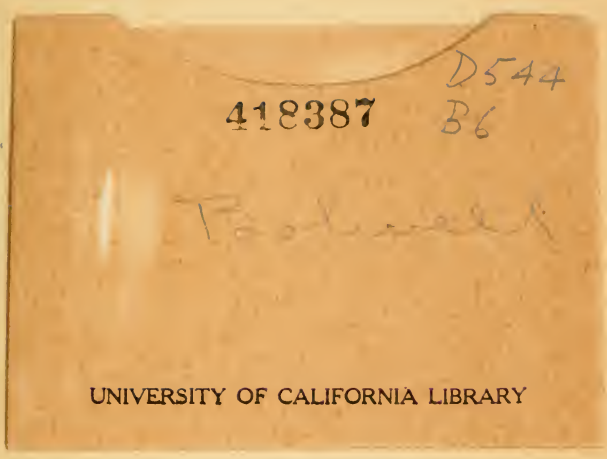
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